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MAUD MORTON.

MAUD MORTON

A Novel.

BY

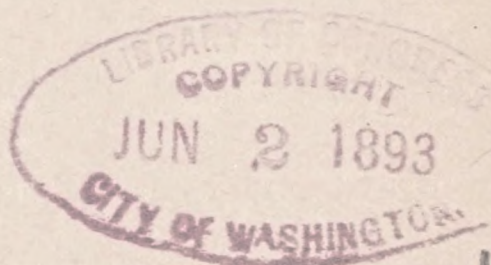
MAJOR ALFRED R. CALHOUN.

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PUBLISHERS' NOTICE.

“MAUD MORTON” is one of Major Calhoun’s most popular stories. The heroine—though of honorable lineage and descended from opulent ancestors—by the strange vicissitudes of fortune, is left an orphan waif in the streets of New York, and grows up a child of the people. But she finds a manly, true-hearted lover and faithful protectors, who gain a clew to her parentage, and fight courageously for her rights against the powerful and unscrupulous enemies who strive to keep her out of her lawful heritage. The history of this struggle between love, integrity and truth, on one side, and hatred, avarice and fraud, on the other side, constitutes one of the most thrilling episodes of life in New York which the pen of the biographer or the novelist has ever depicted.

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MAUD MORTON:

A STORY OF TO-DAY.

CHAPTER I.

— UNDER THE SNOW.

FROM the distance there came a clanging of bells and the hoarse shouting of firemen.

It was night, and the snow, dashed and whirled about by a fierce, cold wind, looked like crimson feathers in the red glow of the neighboring conflagration.

A night, if ever there was one, when the comforts of the humblest home would be sure to be appreciated, and when cozy rooms and warm firesides seemed to young and old the very acme of luxury.

A lamp at a street corner, within a rifle shot of the City Hall, New York, flickered and roared, as if it were going out in a passion.

In the brief intervals between the wind gusts, the light flashed into a doorway, set back from the sidewalk, revealing two crouching, thinly-clad figures, one a woman and the other a little girl of seven or eight.

The woman had the child half covered with an old plaid shawl, which the wind would have whirled away in its cruelly playful mood had not the attenuated arms and thin, bloodless hands held it in place.

Though the ravages of disease had made the woman's face pale and wan, and the light of death glowed in her sunken eyes, there remained a profile of beauty and a certain indescribable air of refinement that told of a past, the memory of which must have intensified, if that were possible, the bitterness of the present.

Though still some hours before midnight, this street, in which there were no dwelling houses, seemed deserted; only the clanging of bells and the shouting of firemen, squares away, told that there were others out in the storm.

"I cannot sleep here, mamma; let us go home where it is not so very, very cold," said the child, raising her little, pinched face to the woman's agonized eyes.

"We have no home, my pet," sobbed the woman, as she pressed her thin, cold lips to the child's cheek. "Poor and wretched as our room was for the last few months, still it was a shelter."

"But why can't we go there now, mamma?"

"I could not pay the rent, my child, and the landlord seized our furniture and turned us out. Homeless, friendless and sick, my darling, what is left us but to starve or beg?" Catching the child to her

shrunken breast, the woman continued, in a voice full of agony:

"Oh, merciful Providence! has it come to this, that I, reared with such jealous care, am alone and friendless with my Maud in the city where once I had friends by thousands, and unstinted wealth at my command?"

"And are you hungry as well as cold, mamma?" asked the child, her own feelings suggesting the question.

"No, no! the hunger pain is past. Oh, darling! if I could die to save you!"

The woman made as if she would clasp the child closer, but her arms weakened and dropped by her side, and her head fell back against the door. She had fainted.

Alarmed for her mother, little Maud ran off to seek help, whither she knew not.

As if impelled by anxiety for her child, the woman quickly recovered, and staggering to her feet, she took a few steps, and looked wildly about her.

A man, clad in a fur coat and cap, stood on the curb, and, while he looked up and down, he muttered, impatiently:

"'Tis a fearful storm, and no hack or street car in sight."

The woman came slowly forward to ask alms for the first time in her life.

The man heard her step, and, as he faced her, the lamplight flashed down on his bold, cruel face,

and, recognizing it, she tottered back, and cried out:

"Oh, heaven! Is Donald Morton here?"

"Who are you, woman?" gasped the man, his voice choking and his purple face showing his alarm.

"No wonder you fail to recognize the ragged, starving widow of your dead brother. Look at me, Donald Morton, and think of the trust you have betrayed and the dependent whom you have defrauded," she said, as she raised her thin, white arms to the storm.

"You are an impostor!" he hissed, and he made as if he would walk on, but she faced him.

"I am homeless and starving, and you are rich. Your brother—my husband—on his dying bed made you the executor of his will and the guardian of our little daughter. How have you kept your trust? You robbed us; and I, wishing to guard my dear husband's family from reproach, have struggled on with my little one under an assumed name."

"You're a maniac!" he hissed. "But even if you were Agnes Morton, you should know that I invested all my brother's wealth with your approval, and that it is lost, without leaving me any the richer."

"The man who would rob the widow and the orphan," said Agnes Morton, bitterly, "would not hesitate at a lie to conceal it. I demand my rights!"

"Demand?" he sneered. "People who make demands should have the power to enforce them." Then, with a cruel laugh, he added: "You do not

impress me as being in a condition to do so at this time."

"I have a friend there!" cried Agnes Morton, pointing upward—"the Father of the fatherless, the Eternal Friend of the poor, and the Champion of the wronged! Crush me if you will, but through all your sleeping and waking keep in mind the words of Him who hath said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay.'"

Overcome by this exertion, the poor woman staggered into the doorway and fell.

"She spoke of the child; I thought them both dead—"

Donald Morton's soliloquy was brought to a sudden end by the sound of voices and approaching footsteps, and he started off.

The voices belonged to two young men whose dress and dinner-pails bespoke them mechanics who had been working over-hours.

When they came in front of the doorway in which Agnes Morton lay, the younger and handsomer of the two called out:

"Hello, Dick. Here's a poor woman that needs help."

"Pshaw! she's drunk. Come along, Ned Rand; and if you don't hurry we can't catch the next car from the Hall," said the other, walking on.

"If you can't wait to do a human being a good turn, Dick Pippis, go home alone; I'll stay," said Ned Rand, setting down his pail, and lifting the uncon-

scious woman into the protection of the doorway, while his late companion hurried out of sight.

"There ought to be a policeman round," said Ned Rand, looking about him, "but they're scarcer than steady work in hard times when they're wanted."

"Where, where is my child?" gasped the woman, as she opened her eyes and saw the stalwart young mechanic bending over her.

"I didn't see any child, upon my word, and I hope, ma'am, that you are mistaken, for it is hard enough on grown folks to be out such a night. Can't I help you to your home—"

The cry of little Maud, as she ran to her mother, abruptly ended Ned Rand's speech.

"I could find no one to help us, mother," said the child.

"Oh, what shall we do?" groaned the mother.

"See here, sissy. Tell me what's up. Maybe I can help you," said Ned Rand, as he took off his overcoat and wrapped it about the child.

"We have nothing to eat, and the landlord turned us out," said the child.

Ned Rand expressed a desire to have "three minutes' private interview, with no officers around, with that landlord." Then he took some change from his pocket and said:

"I'll go halves with you, sissy. Keep this, and I'll run off and see if I can get some help. It will never do to stay out such a night as this, and lots and lots of warm rooms in town. I'll be back in a moment."

The fall of Ned Rand's feet was still audible when Agnes Morton made the child sit down beside her.

Then, taking a chain and locket from her own neck, she whispered as she placed it about that of the child:

"Your dead father's gift to me, Maud. The locket contains his picture and mine. It is all that is left from the wreck. Keep it. Oh, God, protect my little one. Pray, pray for us, Maud!"

The child seemed to realize that a crisis had come.

With a cry of alarm, she dropped on her knees, and clasped the hands that were like ice to the touch.

"Oh, Father in Heaven," prayed the little one, "spare my mother. She is all that is left. Oh, mother, mother, speak to me! Speak!"

There was no reply.

The telegraphic wires overhead sang a solemn dirge as little Maud pressed for the last time the lips that were never to speak again.

While this sad scene was being enacted, Donald Morton, accompanied by a stout man of rougher cast, and warmly but coarsely dressed, came back and stood at the opposite side of the street.

"Fortune favors us, Coots," said Donald Morton, addressing his companion. "There she is, and the child is with her."

"There she is, and from there she'll never move of her own account," said the man addressed as "Coots."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the woman's dead, an' the kid looks as if she wasn't long for this world," said Coots, speaking in a hoarse, rasping voice.

"If the woman is dead, then there is so much trouble saved. I will give you the same sum I offered for both, if you provide for the child. Do you understand, Coots?"

"Oh, I understand," said Coots.

And he drew his hand across his throat, which emitted a gurgling sound.

"This job well done, you will never want for a friend while I have a dollar to spare. Now I will leave you. Call at my office in the morning, and let me know how you got along."

Having said this, Morton turned and hurried away.

"I've been wanting to get into partnership with you for some time," muttered Coots, as he looked after Morton's retreating form. "You're rich, my friend, and can afford to divvy with me."

"Oh, sir, help my poor mother," cried Maud, as she saw Coots coming across the street.

"I'll help you," said Coots.

And he lifted the child in his arms and came under the light.

"Hello! What's this? A gold chain and a locket!"

He opened the locket—it was shaped like a heart of gold—and looked at the pictures.

"I'll take this and keep it for you," he said.

He was about to take the chain from the child's

neck, when she sprang from his arms with a cry of alarm.

“Come back, or I’ll get mad,” he said.

And he ran and seized her by the shoulder.

“Get back, or some one else’ll get mad too!” shouted Ned Rand, as with a well-planted blow he knocked Coots down and took the child in his arms.

“Coots, you thief, I’ve got you at last,” said a policeman, who had come back with Ned. “Stay here for a few minutes, Mr. Rand, till I run this fellow in, and I’ll come back with an ambulance for the woman and her child.”

The officer put a pair of handcuffs on Coots, and started off with him at a run.

CHAPTER II.

A D O P T E D .

THE body of the dead woman was taken to the police station, and Ned Rand told how he had met her and the child.

“We will hold an inquest on the woman in the morning,” said the officer in charge, “and will turn over the child to the officers of Charity and Correction.”

“See here, Captain,” said Ned Rand, as he took off his hat, and pushed back the brown ripples from his white forehead, “I am not a rich man, but, as you know, I am able to care for myself and my mother, as well as the next man. Now, this little one has taken hold of my heart, and I can care for her, too, without any trouble. I somehow feel, you see, as if it was a duty.”

“I don’t know of any man, Ned, who has a higher sense of duty than yourself. Take the child home with you to-night, and come down in the morning and we’ll talk it over. I guess you can have your own way in this,” said the Captain of Police.

“And,” whispered Ned, as he pointed to the form that lay covered with a blanket on a bench near by, “while she was only a stranger to me, and was going

when she asked me to help her, now that she's gone, I'll see that she isn't sent to the Potter's Field."

"All right, Ned. I wish there were a few more men in the world like you," said the Captain; "it'd be a better place to live in."

Ned Rand could not have been over one-and-twenty; indeed, his smoothly shaven face gave him even a more youthful appearance; but the tall form, the easy movements of the body, and the light in the bright hazel eyes, bespoke him every inch a man.

"Now, little sister," said Ned, as he fastened his overcoat about the child till only her gray eyes and her clustering yellow hair were visible, "we'll go home."

"But mamma," said the child.

"Hush! she is resting; you must not disturb her now. Don't be a bit afraid. Call me 'Ned,' if you want anything; and here we go."

Ned folded the child in his arms, nodded to the officers, who in their hearts were blessing the noble fellow, and strode out into the storm, as if nature had designed him to combat with the opposition of men and the fury of the elements.

With the aid of a street car Ned made his way to a narrow, dimly-lit street to the east of that point where Fourth Avenue meets the world-famed Bowery.

The houses were very high, and the many lights gleaming up and down told that they were inhabited,

and the people wide awake, for it was not yet ten o'clock.

About the middle of the block Ned let himself into a house by means of a dead-latch key.

A light burning in the hall revealed a board hanging behind the door, on which were the names of the tenants of the building, with the floors and the number of the rooms they occupied.

The instant Ned's step was heard at the head of the stairs the door of the second-story front room was opened, and a fine-looking, hazel-eyed woman of about forty ran out, exclaiming:

"Why, my dear boy, I have been in agony waiting for you!" Then seeing the bundle—Maud was hidden and asleep in the coat—she asked:

"What have you there?"

"It is this that kept me so late," said Ned. "Come in," here he bent down and kissed his mother, "and I'll show you what I've picked up."

"A poor, blessed, pretty, starved child!" cried Mrs. Rand, as her son laid the sleeping Maud on a sofa in a little room where the table was set for supper. "Where did you find her?"

In a few words Ned told all about it, and ended by saying: "We're not very rich, mother, but I hope you don't blame me."

"Blame you—" Mrs. Rand did not finish the sentence, but she did show how she looked at her son's conduct by throwing her arms about his neck and kissing him.

"What's the child's name?" asked Mrs. Rand, as she began arranging the table for three.

"Maud."

"But her last name?"

"Don't think she's got any."

"Oh, yes, Ned; every one has, or should have, a last name."

"I guess you're right, mother; but I did not learn hers. By the way, wouldn't it be just as well to call her Maud Rand? It sounds pretty good, I think."

Mrs. Rand looked up at the ceiling, as if weighing the matter, and then nodded her head to indicate her approval of the suggestion.

When supper was ready, Mrs. Rand took the famished little form up in her arms, and Maud was kissed into wakefulness.

"Mamma," said the child, wonderingly.

"Yes; I'll be a mamma to you. Come, here is some good supper, and then I shall put you into a nice, warm bed, and you'll be another child in the morning," said Mrs. Rand.

The sight of the steaming food banished every other feeling for the time; and had it not been for Mrs. Rand's watchfulness, the poor little one would have injured herself by eating too much.

Maud was put to bed, and the mother and son sat up till late discussing the situation.

The next morning Maud was so sick that she had to have a doctor; and Ned Rand went off to attend the inquest, and to go, as the only mourner, to the

funeral of the poor woman, the expenses of which he bore himself.

At the coroner's inquest the verdict was given, "Died of consumption."

Here Ned learned from the officers that Coots, who had been arrested the night before, was a noted criminal who had recently escaped from Sing Sing penitentiary, whither he had been returned that morning to serve out the remainder of his sentence.

Ned did only a half day's work that day, but the other half was not thrown away, for he had buried the mother, and received from the court an order constituting him the guardian of the child so providentially thrown in his way.

Manfully, and with a constant effort to fulfill to his best the sacred trust imposed on him, Ned Rand cared for his ward.

In this he was ably seconded by his mother, who soon grew to look upon the child as "flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone."

They changed to a new home after a time, and every one came to believe that Maud Rand was Ned's sister.

Our limited space will not permit us to recount the joy Maud brought to that household, nor the eagerness with which Ned worked that she might be well educated, if not accomplished.

He was a maker of wall-paper, and he had studied so hard, and displayed so much energy and ability that after ten years he was the superintendent of ar

immense establishment, in the upper part of the city, owned by a very rich banker and manufacturer named Donald Morton.

Every one wondered why Ned Rand did not marry.

He was thirty-one years of age, a strikingly handsome man, with quiet, gentle ways, and in the receipt of wages that would warrant him in taking a wife.

Some said that he would never marry as long as his mother—still a hale woman in middle life—lived.

Others were very sure that Ned would take a wife as soon as his beautiful sister Maud was married, and they were very certain that this event could not be long delayed, for bachelors, rich and poor, courted her, the favorite one—the one whom she and Ned liked best—being Edgar Moore, a well connected, rising young lawyer.

There were a few very quiet people, who had known Ned a long time and were therefore familiar with Maud's relations to the family, if not with her origin, who whispered among themselves :

“Mr. Rand is not too old for Maud. She must remember all about that night. What could be more proper than that they should marry?”

The man who would have been most interested in this suggestion never heard it.

Had he harbored any such thought for a moment, his high sense of duty would have driven it from his mind.

Yet, as Maud bloomed into a rarely beautiful and

radiant womanhood, Mrs. Rand, with a mother's loving intuition, imagined that she saw a change in her son.

It had been his custom to romp and play with Maud when he came home from work.

On holidays they would ramble beyond the city's limits and come home laden with wild flowers from the woods.

Or, as her wonderful artistic talent developed, they would spend happy hours drawing and designing together, and in all her studies he took a part.

But now his powerful frame trembled when she sang, and his color would come and go when she suddenly appeared, or when she kissed him, as was her habit at his coming and his going.

All this the mother saw, and it troubled her. She felt that on the one side there was rising above the love of the guardian and the brother the all-absorbing love of the man; while with Maud there remained the steady unwavering affection of the sister.

More than this, Mrs. Rand saw that Maud looked for the visits of Edgar Moore, the handsome young lawyer; that her face grew brighter at his coming; and that she delighted to talk about him, and would blush when his name was jokingly mentioned in connection with her own.

It would be a mistake to infer from this that Maud was either wanting in appreciation and affection or trivial in her conduct. The following incident furnishes the best proof of this.

She had made a number of designs for rich wall-paper, and these she sent to the factory without Ned's knowledge.

To her great joy all were accepted, and a check for a handsome sum was sent her, made payable to the name she had assumed. This check was accompanied by a note asking her to call at Donald Morton's office in the paper factory, where a position would be tendered her at a good salary.

Delighted with her success, Maud gave the letter and check to Ned, who laughed and said:

"It is no surprise to me to learn that you could do acceptable work; but as I make enough and to spare, I can see no need of your adding to the family wages."

"Brother, that is just where you and I differ," said Maud, coming behind him and putting her arms about his neck. "There, if you don't let me speak, I shall hold my hands over your mustache. It has got so heavy I can't feel your mouth any more."

"Go on, Maud; I shall be quiet," he said.

"Have you not often told me," she said, coming round and facing him, "that the happiest people are those who work?"

"Yes, Maud."

"And that work is pleasanter when it is congenial?"

"To be sure," he said.

"And still pleasanter when it is rewarded?"

"Very true."

“Now, I am old enough to earn my own living; work is offered me that you have trained me for; and I am told that if I do it well, I shall be well paid. Only think, Ned, of the pleasure it will give me to be a chum and a fellow-workman or yours. We can go off every morning in high spirits, and come home as happy as you please. Mother has a good girl, thanks to you, to help about the house; so in being more useful I shall not be so much missed.” She bent forward and kissed him. “And then, Ned, when you and I have saved up a lot more money, we can clear the mortgage on this cottage. Won’t that be grand?” she asked joyously.

Ned raised objections, but they were so weak as to go down at once before her eager arguments.

At length he said:

“All right, if the mother consents; I shall take you to the office to-morrow and introduce you as the successful young artist for whom the head of the firm has sent.”

The very next morning Ned took Maud to the great factory, where Donald Morton, as ignorant of her identity as she was of his, engaged his niece as a designer.

CHAPTER III.

A MISSING MAN COMES UNEXPECTEDLY ON THE SCENE.

DONALD MORTON was now a man of eight-and-forty; he had a florid face, a thick neck, a sensual mouth, and little gray eyes, made smaller by drooping eyelids.

Mr. Morton was a widower; he had been married when a very young man, but his wife, it was said, died within the year.

His acquaintances wondered why a man so rich, and living in such grand style, should continue unmarried.

With Donald Morton, wealth might be said to cover a multitude of deformities. In appearance he was a most unattractive man.

It was generally conceded that his moral character was far from high; and it was strongly suspected that his conduct in acquiring his possessions would not bear investigation; yet there were ambitious mammas, who, to use a society phrase, "literally flung their daughters at the rich man's head."

Morton had a palatial city house and a grand villa on the Hudson. He had fine horses to whirl him over the roads, and a fine yacht to bear him over the billows. Servants by the dozen, and employees by

the hundred, stood ready to anticipate his wants, or to do his bidding.

Surely he ought to have been happy, but it is very certain that he was not.

His eyes were hid and his face was florid; and he had a habit of looking quickly about him, as if fearful of being watched or followed.

Ned Rand was very proud of his adopted sister; this was shown when he took her to Donald Morton's office and introduced her with the remark:

"I knew that my sister could do good work, but I had no idea that she was trying to secure a place here as a designer, till she showed me your letter and the check."

"Ah, I am glad to see you, Miss Rand," said Morton, bowing and changing color.

Where had he seen that face before? No doubt he had passed the beautiful girl on the street with her brother.

"I did not want Maud to take the place, but she likes the work and insisted," continued Ned, anxious to show his employer that there was no necessity for his sister's seeking employment.

"I admire Miss Rand's spirit," said Donald Morton, his self-confidence returning, as he noted more particularly the perfect form and exquisite features of the girl. "We are all the better for having congenial employment, and I hope she will like the place."

"And I sincerely hope the place will like me,"

said Maud, with a most becoming blush at her own boldness. "I shall certainly try to do my best."

"A good sentiment," said Morton, with a highly moral manner. "I am sure we shall get along. In the letter offering you the situation, I stated the salary; if that is satisfactory, Miss Rand, your brother will show you to the designing-room and you can go to work at once."

Maud indicated that the salary was entirely satisfactory, and bowing to her employer, she was conducted by Ned to the room devoted to designing.

Donald Morton sat down to write; but, do what he would, he could not drive Maud's face from his mind.

He had never been affected in this way before. He could not explain his feelings to himself. He was given to spasmodic bursts of admiration for the other sex, but he had never tried to deceive himself into thinking that he could fall in love at this late day.

He was drawn irresistibly to the girl, and at the same time he thought of her with something like dread.

Several times during the two hours he spent at the office that morning he left his desk and walked to a point from which, through the glass inclosure, he could see Maud Rand as she bent over her work.

He had so many interests now that he could give only a short time to each during the day. Two hours at the great wall-paper factory; then he would be

whirled down to his Wall street bank in his coupé; and the rest of the day would be spent with mining, railroad or steamboat magnates, for every new enterprise was eager to have connected with it the name of the rich, lucky man.

He left the factory at the usual hour to-day, taking a last look at Maud before he descended to the street, and the sweet face of the young artist bending over her work haunted him in his sleeping and his waking till he returned the next morning.

It had not been his habit to seek out his employees and ask after their health; he rather held himself aloof; but this morning he was at Maud's side before he went to his own desk. And the clerks, who saw him, interchanged winks and significant glances; and one, bolder than the rest, whispered:

"The old man is struck."

Donald Morton, in his private office, had finished up the work for the day, and was thinking about going down to Wall street, when he became aware that a man had entered and was standing beside him.

At first he thought he was a clerk, and paid no heed; but as nothing was said, he looked up angrily, and at the same time asked:

"Well, sir. What is it?"

The man beside him was roughly clad, heavily bearded, and of about his own age. There was a self-assurance in his manner that the other's bluntness did not disconcert. Reaching out his hand in greeting, he said, as he sat down:

"Hello, Morton, you don't seem to remember me?"

"I certainly do not," replied Morton; and there was that in his bearing and tones that said plainer than words: "And I do not care about making any such new acquaintances."

"Oh, come," said the other, apparently enjoying the rich man's anger, "don't say you've forgot Coots."

"Coots!" exclaimed Morton.

"The same, identical, old Coots," laughed the newcomer.

"I—I thought you were dead!"

"And no doubt, old friend, the thought was the child of the wish. But here I am, in good health, but broke as usual."

"I thought you went West, after—"

Donald Morton stopped, checked by the thought he was about to utter, but his purple face, and the tremor of his hands, and the wormy twitching of the thousand little lines about his eyes, told that this meeting had not put him in a happy frame of mind.

"After I got out of the jug, you would say. Out with it. Don't mind me. I'm not a bit sensitive. Used to be sensitive away back, when I began the work for which you often hired me; but familiarity breeds indifference."

"I am sure I sent you money to take you to Australia," said Morton, lowering his voice and glancing nervously about him.

"So you did; and you'd have doubled the amount, if you were sure it would take me to the devil. Well, I did go to Australia; but it got too lively for me out there. The authorities did not fancy my business. I didn't run a bank or a paper-factory; but the enterprises I was a head director in became so unsafe that I thought it best to come home and see my friends. Many of them are dead or in the penitentiary; but you are well and—prospering."

"Yes, Coots, and very busy," said Morton, moving uneasily.

"Well, I'm not busy. Once I was thought industrious, and I meant to be, but when I got in with you, Donald Morton, you showed me how money could be made without hard work, and so I became a gentleman of leisure. What matters it, between pals, if one wins and the other loses? Shouldn't they stand by each other? Have you forgot that saying about honor between what-you-call-uns, eh, my friend?"

"I have no time to talk to you now; you must excuse me," said Morton, rising and reaching for his hat.

"Oh! I can wait," sneered Coots. "I am in no hurry; but I want money before you leave."

"Money!"

"Yes, money; the best and truest friend a man can have. You have lots of it; I am poor. Come," and Coots winked and turned one of his pockets inside out.

"I cannot help you further."

"I'll bet you five dollars that you can, and another five dollars that you will. Oh! I am in no hurry. I'll follow you down to your bank—ain't ashamed to ride with your driver. I helped you to all this wealth, but while I don't expect you to make a square divvy, I must live."

"Hush!" whispered Morton, again sitting down.

"I sha'n't say many more words, but I must have a hundred dollars to day. And let me whisper this." Here Coots sank his voice, and bending over, continued, with startling deliberation: "That girl is still alive, and I know where she is."

"It's a lie!" hissed Morton, holding back the hundred dollars he was about to hand to Coots.

Eagerly snatching the money and cramming it into his pocket, the latter said:

"Defy me to prove my words."

But Donald Morton did not defy the man.

He saw that he was in this fellow's power, and he made up his mind to humor him till he could get him safely out of the way.

"We can see about this again, Coots. You must excuse me now. Here is my city address; come to my house, and let us talk over old times at our leisure."

To this Coots consented, and Morton went down town.

After this Coots called frequently at the paper factory, as often when Donald Morton was not in as when he was.

In this way he became known to Ned Rand and all the employees, none of whom liked him.

He would spend an hour at a time in the designing-room watching the artists at work, and expressing his delight at their skill.

He had often spoken to Maud about her work; and one day, noticing that a heart-shaped locket of gold, fastened about her neck by a chain of the same metal, had escaped and rested on the table, he said :

“Excuse me, Miss Rand, but I should like to look at that locket. Beautiful idea that—*a heart of gold*.”

“I never take it from my neck,” she said, holding up the locket and opening it.

“Great heaven ! But no ; excuse me, miss,” stammered Coots. “I was startled by the resemblance of those faces to people I saw in Australia years ago.”

“My father and mother were never there,” replied Maud.

“No ; I suppose not,” he said, thoughtfully stroking his stubby chin. Then, after a quizzical look at her face, he added : “Oh, of course not. I used to know Ned Rand’s father years and years ago. But he’s dead, isn’t he?”

“Yes,” replied Maud, trying to go on with her work.

“And that there lady,” continued Coots, with a motion of his thumb toward the concealed locket, “she don’t look like Ned Rand’s mother. Saw her only the other day.”

"She is only my adopted mother," Maud managed to say.

"Ah, indeed! Oh, yes, to be sure; only just your adopted mother. Ought to've seed that for myself; for though both very handsome, you and Ned—beg your parding: Mr. Rand—don't look the least scrimp-tion alike. Guess they're blood relations of yours, though?"

Maud shook her head, but made no other reply, for the man disgusted and annoyed her.

"Hate to bother you, miss," persisted Coots, "but of course you can't have no objections to telling an old fellow like me what was yer father's name. You see I'm a great friend of the boss's. Donald Morton an' me was boys at the same time."

"You must excuse me, sir," said Maud, with a reserve that made not the slightest impression on the other, "but I do not care to discuss my affairs with you."

"No; I suppose not," chuckled Coots, "I ain't the kind of a feller that handsome young ladies cares to talk with. But, bless you, if I was free to talk about yer family, I could tell you things that'd interest you more'n anything you ever heard in your whole life. But I ain't the man to intrude where I ain't wanted." And with a bob of his head, intended for a bow, he turned on his heel and left with an expression of triumph on his brutal face.

CHAPTER IV.

“THE OLD, OLD STORY.”

IT was not till the fall of the ex-convict's heavy footsteps had died out, and he had disappeared from sight, that Maud Rand dared to look up from the work in which she had been assuming an interest while he stood beside her.

When he was gone she took out the locket, and after opening the lids and looking lovingly on the faces again, she placed it back inside the dainty bit of lace that encircled her fair white throat.

For some minutes she sat thinking of what Coots had said, and wondering why his coarse face should suddenly seem so familiar to her—and in connection with that locket.

As she sat there pondering, suddenly all the mists that enshrouded the nearly forgotten past seemed to rise and vanish.

Again she stood beside her mother, and saw her dying in the drifting snow.

Again she felt this man, Coots, lifting her up in his strong arms, and carrying her to the neighboring lamp, where his greedy eyes caught sight of the chain, and, after opening the locket, he tried to tear it from her neck.

Vividly she now recalled the welcome appearance of Ned Rand, and the policeman coming to the rescue; the one to carry Coots off, the other to wrap his coat about her, and bear her away in his arms.

All this was as distinct to her mind as if it had just happened, and she had to press her hands to her eyes and look about her again to make sure of her surroundings.

For the first time in many years a great pain came to her heart, and it was destined to remain there for many a day to come.

As if to complete the parallel between the past and the present, she saw the manly form and handsome face of her adopted brother near by. The instant Ned's eyes fell on Maud he noticed her pallor, and said:

“Why, dear sister, you are not well. I feared this confinement would tell on you.”

“I am feeling very well,” she said; “but that man has just startled me.”

“What did he say?”

“He wished to look at my locket; said it was a funny shape, and asked to see the inside. But it was not that so much as his appearance. I do not like him.” And then seeing that Ned, with a serious expression, looked in the direction Coots had taken, she added: “But he is going; let him go. There, I feel all right again. What do you think of this vine and trellis?”

She pointed to the drawing before her, and looked laughingly up at Ned.

"It is very good—very good," he said.

He raised his hand as if he would lay it on her head and stroke her yellow hair approvingly, as had been his habit in the near past, but he checked himself in the act, and turned away to hide the blush it brought to his cheeks. Soon after this incident Coots left the factory, where he was not again seen for over a week; but had he been there every hour he could not have been more on Ned's mind.

A dozen times a day he put to himself the query: "Where have I met that fellow before?" without being able to find a satisfactory reply.

Ned Rand, with his mother and adopted sister, lived in a vine-covered cottage in the upper part of New York city, to which outsiders give the general name "Harlem," but which is known to the residents of that airy and aquatic suburb as "Mount Morris."

This had been a happy home, and its occupants were a standing proof that neither wealth nor leisure is essential to the perfect enjoyment of life.

A few evenings after Maud's brief talk with Coots, and when it seemed that the incident had fled her mind, though such was not the case, Edgar Moore, of whom mention has been made, called at the cottage.

This was not unusual; for nearly a year Edgar had been a constant and, we might add truthfully, a welcome visitor.

He was a handsome young man of twenty-five. He had graduated at Yale, and received a diploma as a bachelor of law from Columbia College.

He was the only child of rich and aristocratic parents; but was neither elated by riches nor spoiled by indulgence.

As one of Donald Morton's attorneys, he had, on one occasion a year before this, visited Ned Rand's cottage. There he met Maud; and on his part, at least, it was a case of love at first sight.

If Edgar Moore's pride in the beautiful girl had been as great as his love, he would not have kept the attachment a secret from his parents.

If Edgar Moore had been a young man of fine sensibilities he might have guessed at Ned Rand's secret and held back till assured of his own success.

But love is proverbially blind and indisputably selfish. The one object of its existence is success.

Perhaps we should make Ned Rand's love an exception; but then in this, as in nearly everything else, Ned Rand was an exceptional man. If he had not been such, he would not have crushed down the feeling that was mastering his life, nor could he have welcomed the young lawyer, as he did, even for Maud's sake.

“My boy,” said Mrs. Rand, as she sat in the vine-covered porch with her son and watched Maud and Edgar Moore going down the grassy bank for a row on the moonlit river, “what is to be the end of this?”

"The end of what, mother?" he replied.

"Of young Moore's wooing."

"Happiness for Maud and for him, I hope."

"Ned, you are not yet thirty-one, and Maud is about nineteen."

"What of that?" he asked, quickly.

"Nothing, save that you are not too old. She is full of gratitude; and if you let me tell her your secret, she would not say 'no.'"

"My secret!" he repeated.

"Yes, my boy; the first secret you ever tried to keep from me. But the mother's eyes are ever quick to discover what tortures her child. Ned, you love that girl, and that love will either curse or bless all your coming years. Be the brave man that you ever were, and tell her all—"

"Mother! mother!" interrupted Ned, with a half-suppressed cry, "do not talk in that way. The night I brought that little one home from the arms of her dead mother, I made a vow to heaven that I should care for and protect her with my life. If I have come to love her, that is my fault, not hers. The feeling is unjust to my better nature, and I shall crush it out, though it kills me. My love shall never be a bar to her happiness. It shall never be said that my years of devotion were prompted by a selfish object. There! There! Do not be provoked with me, dearest and best of mothers. Let the subject drop."

Ned Rand kissed his mother and entered the cot-

tage, but in doing so he saw the boat, with its light-hearted occupants, drifting like a great bird over the silvery path made by the round white moon.

While not unconscious of his splendid physique and handsome, expressive face, Ned Rand felt that Maud must be drawn to one nearer her own age, and more closely allied to her by culture and natural aptitude. Such a person he believed Edgar Moore to be.

And Edgar Moore, drifting down with the moonlit tide, had much the same feeling.

The moonlight, that makes even an ordinary face attractive, fell upon Maud's uplifted countenance, till the young man thought her the most angelic creature on whom his eyes had ever rested.

“It is heaven to be here,” he said, speaking his thoughts, rather than with any idea of getting a response.

“It is a lovely night,” was Maud's comment.

“It would, indeed, be a gloomy night that your presence did not brighten,” said Edgar Moore, bending forward till he could look into her eyes.

“I suppose it is the correct thing to feel thankful, or at least to express thanks, for such a compliment; but, really, you must excuse me, Mr. Moore.” And Maud's silvery laugh thrilled from the young man's ears to his heart.

“I know,” he said, with a sudden seriousness, “that such compliments are too often empty; and perhaps I should not have imitated the manner of a man of

the world in addressing you. But, Maud, the time has come when I must speak; when from your lips I must learn the best or the worst that life has in store for me."

He paused and looked at her.

She made no response, but gazed down at the ripple made in the water by the tips of her tapering fingers.

Edgar Moore was profoundly moved.

His face was pale. He had taken off his hat, so revealing the open, tremulous lips, the eager eyes and quivering nostrils.

Suddenly bending forward, he caught her left hand from the seat, and said, in a deep, passion-laden voice:

"Maud! Maud! I love you more than I do my soul!"

He could feel her hand trembling like a caged dove in his eager clasp; but after a gentle effort to free it, she let him raise it to his lips, then said, with a calmness that told of a feeling more profound, if less impetuous, than his own:

"I am unschooled in the ways of society, so that I cannot pretend that your declaration is a surprise; yet before you made it, it might have been better if you knew more about me."

"I know all I care to know," he said quickly. "The only thing more I care to learn is that you love me."

"I might answer that question now. Yet I shall not. I first must speak to you of two things."

“Of two things, Maud?”

“Yes; about your family and mine.”

“I know your family, and you shall know mine,” he said.

Looking down at her hand, which again was rippling the water, Maud continued:

“You should know that I am neither Mrs. Rand’s daughter nor Ned’s sister—though no relationship could make them dearer to me. I do not know my own age; but when I was six or seven years old—I remember the time as if it was yesterday—Ned Rand found me and my dying mother outcasts in the streets. It was a cold, snowy night, and he wrapped me in his overcoat and took me to his home. My mother died that night, and I never saw her again.”

“Ned Rand is a noble fellow,” said Edgar, evidently startled by Maud’s revelation.

“No words can express my brother’s merits. To me earth holds no nobler, braver man. But I was going to say that it is better you should know all about me, and tell the same to your father and mother. Tell them that I do not even own a name, but that it is borrowed from my adopted mother and brother. Tell them that I work for my living, and am proud of it. And, above all, tell them that whatever I am, I owe to my brother. Do this, Edgar, and let me know what your father and mother say, or rather tell my brother what they say, then come for my answer; but, till then, I must beg you not to say another word to me on this subject.”

By this time the boat had drifted a half mile below the cottage.

“I shall try to do as you wish,” said Edgar Moore, hoarsely. And he stroked his brow, which was damp, but not with the dampness of heat.

He took up the oars and rowed back, but not another word was spoken till the landing was reached, by which time a heavy black cloud had drifted across the face of the moon.

CHAPTER V.

DONALD MORTON'S SECRETARY.

UP to the return of Coots from Australia, Donald Morton felt secure, if not comfortable, in the thought that the wife and child of his dead brother were forever out of the way. He had no doubt as to the death of the woman, and as he had paid Coots to get rid of the child, he felt sure that it had been done.

Long years of undisturbed prosperity, added to an utter want of conscience, had made him indifferent to, if not wholly forgetful of, the existence of the man whom he had found so useful.

He was not ready to believe Coots' hint that the girl was still living; indeed, he was firmly convinced of the opposite, yet the fact that the wretch affirmed that he had not earned his money by making away with the child made Morton very unhappy.

Clearly, his own safety lay in getting Coots to tell where the girl was, and then to get rid of him.

How to do this puzzled him. He dared not attempt the work unaided; but when such a man has not his tools ready to hand, he usually knows how to get them.

Donald Morton had a confidential clerk or private

secretary named Homer Chiswick. This young man lived with his employer, and might be said to be his most intimate friend.

Homer Chiswick claimed to be an Englishman. He was about twenty-six years of age, with black hair and eyes, and dark features, which some thought wonderfully handsome.

His appearance and quiet, cat-like movements made him conspicuous on the streets, where, by the way, he was but seldom seen in the daytime.

He was a man of varied attainments; and as his employer was wholly lacking in culture, Homer Chiswick's talents were used for business by day and to add to his employer's amusement at other times.

"Are you going out to-night, Chiswick?" asked Morton, as his secretary pushed his chair back from the table, after a seven o'clock dinner.

"No, sir, if you wish me to remain in."

"Yes; I want to have a chat with you in the library. We can talk and smoke."

"I shall be most happy, sir," said Chiswick, rising and bowing.

The library was a splendid apartment, with its carved book-cases, fine pictures, statues and artistic bric-a-brac. Morton did not know much about such things, but as other rich men had them, he felt that they were essential to respectability, even if they gratified no want.

Seated in big chairs, upholstered in leather, Don-

ald Morton and his secretary lit their Havana cigars, and faced each other from opposite sides of the library table.

Chiswick looked respectfully expectant at his employer, whose heavy, florid face showed that he had something on his mind which he would get rid of as soon as he had hit upon a proper plan.

After a pause, which was getting painful, Morton coughed and said, somewhat huskily:

"Let me see, Chiswick—how long have you been with me?"

"Three years, sir, less two months," replied Chiswick promptly.

"And you have been pleased with your place?"

"I'd have been hard to suit if I wasn't, sir."

"I have tried to treat you well."

"As you do every one, sir," interrupted Chiswick.

"I'm afraid every one does not think about that as you do—"

"Every one cannot live with you and learn to know you so well as I do," said the young man admiringly.

"Perhaps not, Chiswick. But to come to the point, I believe I can trust you; I know it will be well worth your while to be faithful to me," said Morton, laying his cigar on a little bronze salver, and turning his full face to his secretary.

"It may be, sir, that you, who know the world so well, would not believe me, if I were to tell you that my fidelity to you is not wholly prompted by the

salary you pay me," said Chiswick, imitating his employer as to the cigar.

"Yes, Chiswick, if I did not think that you were more faithful than most men, our social and business relations would hardly be so intimate. But, heretofore, you have only carried out my orders; to-night I come to you for advice—"

"You honor me, sir; but if there can be any question about which *you* could have a doubt, it would be sheer folly for *me* to attempt to set you right."

"Still, there are questions, particularly where the heart is involved, where the wisest man may be the very worst judge as to what is best to be done." This was said somewhat condescendingly; then he added, with an attempt at laughter: "I'm afraid I'm in love."

"In love, sir!" exclaimed Chiswick.

"Yes. I believe that's what they call it when a gentleman has a certain lady so much on his mind that he cannot think of anything else. But here's the first trouble: I must be at least twenty or thirty years older."

"Then she must be a child, sir; for you don't look more than thirty-five. I don't say this to flatter you, for I have heard many others say the same thing. Besides which, Mr. Morton, years do not count with gentlemen who, in addition to being favored with what is called masculine beauty, have also fortune behind them," said Chiswick, looking from the pleased face of his employer to the rich appointments of the library.

"Fortune should count for something," resumed Morton, with a smile that said plainer than words—"Fortune counts for everything; it stands for youth, talent, culture, beauty and conscience."

"Particularly, sir," said Chiswick, "if the lady have only youth and beauty on her side."

"That is just the case here, Chiswick. The young lady is an artist employed at my paper factory. She is the sister of my superintendent."

"Mr. Rand?"

"Yes; he is a fine fellow. But do you think my choice would cause any talk—I mean any unpleasant comment in what we call 'the world'?"

"Surely no unpleasant comment. People of sense would approve your independence. Even the more romantic would say: 'Here is a man who could increase his fortune by choosing a rich wife, but he prefers to marry for love.' As to the lady, sir, I have seen her, and, if you will permit me to make a comment—"

Chiswick hesitated, and Morton nodded for him to proceed.

"I'd say, sir, that if there is a more beautiful young lady in face and form in the city of New York, or in any other city that I ever visited, I never saw her face nor her picture."

"Then you do not think I'd be acting foolish in marrying Miss Rand?"

"On the contrary, sir, you'd be giving an additional proof of your wisdom."

"Thank you, Chiswick. Your opinion agrees with mine," said Morton, as he relit his cigar.

It will be noticed that nothing was said by either master or man as to the young lady's consent. Both took that for granted. What poor girl could dream of refusing the hand of her rich employer?

Through the smoke rising from their cigars the men looked at each other.

It was evident to Chiswick that Morton had not unbosomed himself of everything about which he wanted advice.

After a silence of some moments, the latter said :

"You would hardly think that when I was a young man I was a bit wild."

"No, sir; I could never think that," said the sycophant.

"I was wild, but never intentionally wicked. But when I was a young, generous fellow, I took upon myself the blame of many things to save my friends."

"That would be just like you, sir."

"And so," continued Morton, "I foolishly placed myself in the power of an unprincipled fellow named Coots. The man was afterward in the penitentiary, and I lost sight of him for years, during which I supposed him dead; but he has turned up to plague me, and, between us, he is blackmailing me. Now, what would you do in such a case?"

"Gentlemen don't care about arresting such a fellow and facing him in a court, where the papers will

publish his lies as if they were truth, and too many will be ready to believe them."

"Of course not, Chiswick. You see the point just as I do."

"And if such a wretch is bribed to leave, why, it is only getting a respite till he has exhausted his money."

"That's the case, Chiswick."

"To me," continued Chiswick, "the life of such a man is not nearly so precious or sacred as the life of a mad dog. Why should a creature like that be permitted to curse a man like you, when for a few hundred dollars another creature like himself can be hired to put him out of the way?"

"Do you think you could arrange that for me, Chiswick?" asked Morton, extending his hand across the table as if asking for help.

"I do, sir."

"And you are willing to help me?"

"Not only willing, but anxious," said Chiswick, seizing his employer's hand and pressing it to show his devotion.

"If you can have this fellow removed forever, Chiswick, it will be the most profitable stroke of work you ever did. He will be at the factory in the morning. Trail him down; give all your time to him, if need be; and come to me for whatever money you want. Do you understand me?"

"As clearly as I understand the multiplication table. Nothing more need be said till I am ready

to report. I shall draw on you for whatever cash may be needed."

"You can have all you want."

"And, sir, if I can show my devotion in this way, I shall be happy."

With this understanding master and man parted for the night.

Morton felt that a great load had been taken from his mind. He had faith in his tool. In his eagerness to be rid of Coots, he never dreamt that he could be placing his fate in the hands of a man whose audacity, intelligence, and utter want of principle made him a genius in those ways of crime wherein Coots, with his brutality and clumsy methods, was only a blundering bungler.

After this interview, Donald Morton went down to his club, but Homer Chiswick remained in the library pretending to read, but in reality thinking over a subject that was anything but literary.

Mrs. Belton, the gray-haired, comely housekeeper, came in about ten o'clock to have a chat, as was her habit, with the young secretary.

Already Chiswick had learned all that the old lady could tell him about her employer's past life; but tonight he adroitly questioned her again, trying, if possible, to get a clew to Coots's secret; but she knew nothing about Donald Morton that was not commendable, except that she had a woman's natural antipathy to men who can marry and will not.

Mrs. Belton had a pretty little niece named Annie,

who often visited her, and between whom and the handsome young secretary the old lady was anxious to get up a match.

She spoke about Annie Belton to-night; but the secretary, though treating her with a cat-like softness that implied interest, was thinking, by turns, of another young lady and of a man whose acquaintance he was planning to make.

Even after Homer Chiswick went to bed he could not sleep.

His employer's confidence had opened up to him vast vistas of success, among which was the possibility that he might take the place of Coots, and use it to so much advantage as to make himself the master instead of the servant.

For long hours he perfected his scheme.

He fully made up his mind to get rid of Coots.

"But," he reasoned, "to put this Coots out of the way, without learning his secret, would be much like sinking in the depths of the ocean a heavy wallet, the contents of which may be of untold value. I shall empty him before throwing him overboard."

From this it will be seen, as is usually the case under such circumstances, that Donald Morton, in attempting to get out of the frying pan, deliberately leaped into a very hot fire.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRETARY BEGINS HIS CAMPAIGN IN EARNEST.

WITHIN full sight of Ned Rand's beautiful cottage there was a large cluster of shanties, where beer and more fiery liquors were kept for sale, and near by there were huts built on floating scows, around the sides of which were strips of painted canvas bearing the legends: "Boats to hire by day or hour," "Fishing tackle and bait always on hand," "Fresh beer on tap," "Neptune Refreshment House."

The latter inscription floated from a flag-staff attached to a structure that looked like a cross between a railroader's shanty and a Noah's ark. It was built on a raft, which raft was chained to a green, slimy spile, though as it was only afloat when the tides and winds raised the waters of the Harlem, about the season of the fall or spring equinox, the precaution of the chain seemed unnecessary.

At the end of this raft, toward the stream, a number of row boats were fastened.

The Neptune House was owned by Mrs. Wogley, and the duty of keeping it in order devolved on a stout, wholesome-looking daughter of twenty, who was known to the amateur boatmen far and near as "Polly, the water nymph."

The row boats were owned and hired out by "Push" Wogley, the son and brother of the above-mentioned women.

Push Wogley was a stout, thick-necked young athlete of two or three-and-twenty, with little gray eyes, and a broken nose that detracted somewhat from his personal beauty.

Though picturesquely housed, these three people would be scarcely worth the introduction, were it not that Mrs. Wogley was the wife and the son and daughter the children of Coots, the ex-convict.

With a dim notion that it would be better for her children and herself not to be known as "Cootseses," Mrs. Wogley, even before her husband's conviction, retained her maiden name, and insisted that her children should share the same with her—an arrangement wholly agreeable to Coots, who had no pride or choice in such matters.

Our interest in this strange family must be further increased by the fact that Polly Wogley was over head and ears in love with our good friend Ned Rand.

The fact that Ned not only had not encouraged this sentiment, but was entirely ignorant of its existence, did not deter Polly from nursing it. She worshiped her hero from a respectful distance, and took no pains to hide her feelings from her mother and brother.

The Neptune Refreshment House consisted—besides the awning-covered space devoted to boating

parties—of a good-sized family room and kitchen, and three little cubby holes, known respectively as “mom’s,” “siss’s,” and “Bud’s” bedrooms.

Mrs. Wogley had long believed herself to be a widow, and it need not be said that this fact never caused her children nor herself a tear nor a pang of pain. So when Coots came home, after an absence of many years, his welcome could hardly be called ardent or even civil.

But when Coots appeared a few days afterward and gave each of his children ten dollars and his wife twenty, with the promise of “lots more when that ran out,” his family became more demonstrative in their attentions, if not actually more affectionate.

Ned Rand had a boat of his own, in which he often took a pull in the evening when home in time, and it was on these excursions that Polly saw and fell in love with him, after her fashion.

While rowing one evening, Ned was not a little surprised to see Coots on the Neptune House float, and with him Homer Chiswick.

Ned recalled that he had not seen the latter about the factory of late, and, as he had never liked him, he rather hoped that the fellow was discharged.

When he reached the cottage—where he found Maud and Edgar Moore on the porch—he told about Chiswick; and young Moore said:

“I know the gentleman.”

“And what do you know about him?” asked Ned.

“That he is as well educated as he is handsome

and mysterious; and that is saying a great deal," was the laughing reply.

"It is said that people at sea can tell the approach of an iceberg," said Maud, "by the lowering of the temperature; in the same way I can tell if that man is about. And as to his being handsome, why, that is a matter of taste."

"Upon my word, I am glad he is not to your taste," said Edgar, with another laugh. "He is not the kind of man I should care to have for a rival."

And yet, in spite of her dislike, as we shall see, this man, Homer Chiswick, was destined to become a rival and to win a mysterious influence over the beautiful girl that neither she nor even himself dreamt of at the time.

Chiswick had tact, address, cunning, and a wonderful knowledge of the ignorant and criminal classes.

These qualities enabled him to get into Coots's confidence at once.

Like all his class, Coots was shrewd and suspicious; so that it is doubtful if he would have placed any reliance on Chiswick had he believed that that young man still remained in the employ of Donald Morton.

The first confidential meeting of these two men was in a resort of thieves in the lower part of the city; and there, after they had drank and smoked for some time, Chiswick told how he had been dismissed that morning without any warning.

"I've been faithful to that man, Mr. Coots," he said, with great secrecy of manner, "and I've done things for him that no one else would do; yet at the very time when I need money the most he throws me off without a day's warning."

"And didn't he give no reason?" asked Coots.

"Only that he thought I was getting to know too much about his affairs," replied Chiswick.

"I know more about his affairs than you do, yet he can't chuck me off in that way," said Coots, with an oath and a savage display of his big teeth.

"It would be better for me if I knew less or had known more," sighed Chiswick.

"Ah, if I only had your eddycation," said Coots, with a loud smack of his heavy lips, "then," here he held up his immense hand and slowly closed the fingers ill they cracked as if they were crushing something, "I'd have Donald Morton like that; then I'd be the master; then I'd have bank accounts an' fine horses, an' yachts, an' carriages; then I'd be the boss, an' he'd take his orders from me."

"You are a bright fellow, Coots; and as for education, why, you have enough. Still, if you think my education could be of any use to you, I am yours to command, for I don't mind saying that I like you, and I have liked you since I first saw you."

Here the two men shook hands, and more liquor and cigars were ordered.

Chiswick was working on a plan.

He knew that if he showed any curiosity as to

Coots's secret, that fellow would draw back, if, indeed, he did not suspect his purpose.

The best way to win confidence is to first become confidential.

At the second meeting with Coots, Chiswick pretended to be much under the influence of liquor. He vowed his regard for his new friend, and he showed his faith by telling, after many pledges to secrecy, the story of his own life.

As he gave it, it was a record of daring crime, in which his education and coolness helped him.

Though quite capable of the deeds of which he claimed to be the hero, it is safe to say that these particular exploits were the creatures of his own fertile fancy.

The result was as he had expected.

Coots proposed that they should work together, and to this Chiswick agreed.

"But," said Coots, when this bargain was made, "Donald Morton, he's my private game; an' while I'm willin' to help you along with what I get from him you can't expect for me to give you the drop I have on him."

"Certainly not, Coots," said Chiswick; "but I'm in hopes that after a bit you'll have faith enough in me to let me help you. I want to get even with that man, and I will, if I have to wait for years."

Chiswick had a key that admitted him to his employer's house, and he appeared there, always at a late hour of the night, to report progress.

He cheered Morton with the belief that he would soon have Coots either dead or in the penitentiary for life.

At such times Morton was always anxious to hear all that Coots said. His object was to learn if Chiswick had any clew to his secret; and Chiswick, shrewdly seeing through his motive, told him only what he was sure would please him.

It was a great evidence of confidence for Coots to invite the man he now called his "chum" to visit his family at the Neptune Refreshment House.

As an additional inducement for Chiswick to accompany him Coots said:

"I've got a daughter that the boatmen call 'Polly the water nymph,' an' if there's any finer-looking gal—except one, as is my own particklar gal, an' she don't live far away—I'd like to have her trotted out and put through her paces before proper judges."

"If she is at all like her father, she must be an excellent young lady," said the diplomatic Chiswick.

And it was on the occasion of this first visit that Ned Rand saw Chiswick on the Neptune House float, and while he was surprised at the sight, he could not see, without the gift of prophecy, the effect that the meeting of these two men at this place was to have on his own life, and particularly upon the life of one who was dearer to him than all the world besides.

Mrs. Wogley did not meet Chiswick very graciously. Although the wife of a thief, she aimed to do

as near right and to walk as near straight as her rough life-path and dim light permitted.

Push Wogley took to Chiswick at once. Push had all his father's mental and moral characteristics.

Polly was very much like her mother, even in her regard for the visitor whom she was to know so well.

That night, after the rest of the family had retired, Coots and Chiswick sat in the main room of the Neptune House, with a bottle between them.

The lamp burned low, and the splashing and moaning of the tide could be heard outside.

Coots had been drinking heavily; still he spoke in cautious whispers.

"The time has come, ole chum," he said, about midnight, "when I think I can trust you with all."

"And if I deceive you," replied Chiswick, with a vigorous handshake, "may I be shot and then hanged and beheaded."

CHAPTER VII.

COOTS TELLS HIS SECRET.

EVEN when Coots had determined to take Homer Chiswick into what he called "pardnership," by revealing to him the secret of his control over Donald Morton, he hesitated again and again as if doubt and faith, confidence and suspicion, were struggling in his heart.

He felt that, with Chiswick for an ally, he could control Morton to his liking; and as he firmly believed Chiswick's story and his professions of hate, he had every reason for the confidence he finally decided to give.

But as an additional safeguard, though the act must strike the reader as a strange travesty in a sacred form, he made Chiswick raise his hand and swear that he would keep the secret from all the world "under the penalty of dying like a dog if he played false."

Chiswick swore to this, as he would have sworn to anything, if necessary to accomplish his purpose.

"And mind you," added Coots, with an awful oath, "if you ever go back on me, I'll kill you as if you was a mad dog."

"And I shall deserve to die," said Chiswick.

Little did either of them think at that moment of the terrible consequences that were to follow this secret, and the oath intended to keep it from passing to the knowledge of another.

With a little table between them, on which was a candle, a bottle, two glasses, and a bundle of cigars, Coots, in a hoarse whisper, told the black story of his own life.

He thought it better to do this that Chiswick might see just how he came to know Donald Morton and to learn the secret of his wickedness.

As Coots had but little sense of right left, he made no effort to appear better than he was, nor did he offer any other excuse than the money he obtained, for acts the narration of which would have filled with horror a less sensitive man than Homer Chiswick.

"There," said Coots, as in conclusion he drained his glass, "that's the hold I've got on Donald Morton, and he can't shake it off to save his soul."

"It's a good hold," said Chiswick, thoughtfully, "but to my thinking it isn't as strong as it might be. You see, if Morton wasn't a coward, he could defy you to prove what you say; then where would you be?"

"I'd be on top every time."

"Perhaps I might think as you do, if I knew where this girl was to be found," said Chiswick.

So far Coots had not mentioned his discovery of Maud; and the other was naturally very anxious to learn all about it.

"Well," replied Coots, again reaching out his hand, "I've told you everything except that gal's name an' where she's to be found; an' I don't see why I shouldn't let the hide go with the hoofs and horns and tell you all."

"The oath I made you at first, old friend, will cover everything you may tell me now or in the future," said Chiswick, still holding the other's hand and pressing it to show his high regard.

In a low whisper, as if he were alarmed at the importance of his own secret, Coots told all he knew of his own knowledge and all he had learned about Maud Rand.

In conclusion he said:

"She's the gal that should nave all that wealth, an' I know it, an' Donald Morton he knows that I know it; an' he's got the papers somewhere to prove it. Ah, if I could only get at them, an' knew how to use them after I'd got my hands on 'em, I'd make him dance till he fell down dead."

"I think," said Chiswick, after a thoughtful pause, "that I know where Morton keeps all his private papers; and it might be, if you had the nerve to try it, that we could get at them."

"I have the nerve to try anything, if you'll only stand by me like a true pal."

"Till death," replied Chiswick.

Again they shook hands, as if this pledge were essential at every new phase of their scheme.

It was now past midnight.

Coots, who had been drinking freely while ridding himself of his profitable secret, was quite drunk.

He fell to the floor in an attempt to rise, and his son Push, hearing the noise, came out and led him in to bed.

Chiswick left the Neptune House, and with his hat pulled down and his coat collar turned up, for the night air was raw, he hastened in the direction of Murray Hill, in which aristocratic quarter was the stately abode of his master.

Of his master? Well, Donald Morton had been his master, but the young man, with his heart full of an unholy ambition and his active brain full of Coots's astounding revelations, felt that he was now the master.

He rejoiced in the consciousness of the power this secret gave him, as a young giant rejoices in his strength.

He would first ascertain, so far as was possible, the truth of Coots's story. He would find and examine all Morton's private papers. And when he could prove the truth, as he believed it, he would then win Maud Rand's hand at all hazards, demand justice in the name of his wife, and so become a hero to the romantic, and a man of wealth and power to the great majority who care only for such things.

Late though it was when he reached home, he found Morton up and waiting for him.

"You've been making a night of it," was Morton's salutation.

"I couldn't get away sooner, sir," said Chiswick, with that deference which distinguished his manner when talking to his employer.

"And what luck?"

"Well, sir, I've nearly given up all hope of finding a man to do for Coots, at least at this time, and I understand that you want him out of the way as soon as possible?"

"The wretch cannot be put out of the way too soon," hissed Morton.

"If, sir, you could have him sent to the penitentiary for the rest of his natural life, wouldn't that do nearly as well?" asked Chiswick.

"It would have to do, if nothing better could be done. I am depending on you, Chiswick."

"Then why not leave the whole matter to me?"

"I am willing to do so, but I do not want to be left in the dark. Now, you just spoke about sending this fellow to the penitentiary. How do you propose to manage that?"

"Easily enough. You know Coots believes I hate you, and that I am his sworn friend."

"So you told me; but if he were so much your friend, he would tell you all about the hold he claims to have on me," said Morton, trying to read the young man's dark, impassive face.

"You have told me, sir, and so I have made no effort to pump him, though I will confess I should have no hope of getting anything out of him. But

as to putting him behind the bars, why, I should get him to rob this house—”

“To rob this house!” exclaimed Morton.

“Yes, sir, or at least to try it and be caught in the act. Then, if he should disclose anything about you, why, every one would say that the wretch who tried to plunder you would not hesitate to lie about you when justice defeated his plans.”

“True, true,” said Morton. “You have a long head, Chiswick. Think this matter over carefully. I leave it entirely in your hands, but do not make any important move without letting me know.”

Chiswick promised to consult his master at every step, and with this understanding the men went to their beds just as the silvery bell of the ormolu clock on the mantel struck two.

Chiswick had no further use for Coots.

He was now as anxious to have him out of the way as was his employer.

He thought the matter over all night; and, as he was now the master of his own time, he made up his mind, before taking another step, to remain at home that day and examine Donald Morton's private papers.

These were in a secret drawer in a safe that was set in one end of the library wall.

He had the combination of the safe, and, as he frequently spent days working alone in the library, nothing that he might do there now in the way of examining papers could possibly excite the suspicion

of Mrs. Belton, the housekeeper, or of any of the servants.

In addition to his wonderful coolness and rare intelligence, Homer Chiswick was a man of method.

While firmly believing Coots's story about Maud Rand, he fully realized that this story, if unsupported, would make only the flimsiest kind of evidence in a court of justice.

There must be proof in existence, at least; if there was not, he determined to know it.

He would begin at the very beginning, keeping a strict record of every step he took until certain victory or defeat confronted him.

He had set himself a great task, but he had that self-confidence which distinguishes energy combined with intelligence.

Nor was this all he had set himself to do. He must hold his influence over Coots till he got him out of the way; and he must get acquainted with Maud Rand, and throw the spell of his strange magnetism about her.

It is a peculiarity of executive genius that when it does not find circumstances to its liking, it creates circumstances to further its ends.

Chiswick soon found out that Maud Rand was in the habit of rowing two or three times a week on the Harlem River, with Edgar Moore.

Without being observed, he watched them for several evenings from the protection of the Neptune House sitting-room.

From these observations he became convinced that there was a great deal of love on young Moore's side, but that Maud's feelings for him were of the romantic rather than the real kind.

While watching the young people in the boat he made up his mind to secure an introduction to Maud after an heroic fashion.

He found in Push Wogley, who had become one of his warmest admirers, a faithful ally in this work.

"Push," he said, one evening, "I'd give twenty dollars in cash if that boat, with those two young people on board, could be made to upset some evening this week, right in front of the Neptune House."

"I can have it done for that money," said Push. "But, mind you, Mr. Chiswick, I won't let neither of 'em get drowned. That'd never do."

"Nor do I want either of them to be drowned. I want you to leap in and seize the man. Even if he can swim, you must keep him away from the young lady," said Chiswick.

"But you don't want the purty gal to drown?"

"No, Push. I propose to save her myself."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Push, with a knowing wink.

Three evenings after this Edgar Moore and Maud were out rowing again.

It was growing dark, and they were returning, against the wind and tide, to the landing below Ned Rand's cottage.

Suddenly, from the cluster of shanties and floats

of which the Neptune House was the center, a heavy barge, rowed by two men, shot out.

Edgar Moore was not a skillful oarsman. He was out of the channel. He heard Maud's shriek and the shout of the men in the barge, but in his effort to avoid the collision he brought his boat broadside on to the bow of the heavier craft.

In an instant the boat turned, and Maud and her dazed escort were flung into the tide.

"Save the man, Push," shouted Chiswick, as he threw away his hat and flung off his coat.

With the strong, straight, headlong leap of a practiced diver, Chiswick struck the water near the place where Maud had gone down.

A few painful seconds to the people now crowding the shore, and the daring swimmer reappeared with the unconscious girl in his arms.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAUD'S MANY LOVERS.

THERE are always ready feet to carry bad news, so that Ned Rand, who was reading by early lamp-light in the cottage, was not long in ignorance of Maud's danger.

At the first note of alarm he rushed to the river.

He saw the crowds on the floats about the Neptune House, and thither he ran, to find that Maud had been saved through the gallantry of a young gentleman named Chiswick, and that she was being revived by Mrs. Wogley and her daughter, in the principal apartment of their strange abode.

Edgar Moore was but an indifferent swimmer, and it would have gone hard with him had it not been for the young man who had planned the accident and the rescue.

Push took the young lawyer to his own room, and dressed him in a suit of his own rough, warm clothing.

Edgar Moore, like a brave man, was quite indifferent to his own safety.

He was nearly distracted till Push told him that Miss Rand was dressed up in Polly's Sunday best, and that she was "just as bright and strong as if nothing at all had happened."

Polly Wogley came out to where Ned Rand was standing on the float, and taking his hand between both her own strong palms, she said:

“Yer sister’s all right, Mr. Rand. She only went down wanst, when Chiswick, he duv in and catched her. I ain’t had no ust for that feller till this time, but he’s game, an’ he’s got narve; and I do like men of that kind.”

Still holding Ned’s hand, Polly led him into the room where Maud was standing, with no indication in her beautiful face of the ordeal through which she had just passed.

As soon as she caught sight of Ned, she ran to him; and he thanking heaven in his heart, folded her close to it, and whispered:

“Anything worse than this would have killed me. There, rest a moment till I thank the brave man who rescued you.”

At that moment Homer Chiswick came in, and Ned took both his hands and thanked him, in his own generous way, for his gallant conduct.

“You must come up to the cottage with us, Mr. Chiswick, where I can give you dry clothes, and my mother will make you a hot drink.”

“I shall be thankful for the dry clothes,” said Chiswick, “but as to the warm drink, why, I never felt less in need of medicine in my life. I regret the accident, and I fear that my own carelessness had even more to do with it than Mr. Moore’s.”

“No,” cried Edgar Moore, who had come in look-

ing like a refined edition of Push, "the fault was wholly mine; and if it had not been for the gallantry of those two gentlemen, I fear it would have gone hard with Maud and myself, for I was so stunned by the crash that I knew nothing till I found myself being dragged out of the water."

This was certainly very manly, but Chiswick, as the hero of the occasion, insisted in the most noble and magnanimous way on taking the great share of the blame on himself and Push.

And thus it came about that, in telling the truth in an untruthful way, he increased in the eyes of others the merits of an act that on the face of it was very heroic.

Polly Wogley insisted on going up to the cottage with Maud's wet clothes, and on the way she devoted herself to Ned.

This was the first time she had ever spoken to him, and she availed herself of the occasion to show, by a manner that was more eloquent than any words, the warmth of the feeling with which she regarded him.

On his part, Ned was pleased with the girl's evident earnestness and honesty—being wholly without suspicion, how could he guess her secret? And when they parted at the cottage, he thanked Polly, and told her if she ever wanted a friend, to let him know.

Polly Wogley went home very happy; and she told her mother, whom she had already acquainted

with her feeling for Ned Rand, that she was sure he felt toward her pretty much as she did toward him. Edgar Moore went home as soon as Mrs. Rand had dried his clothes at the cottage.

He was not pleased with himself.

He had presented to him the opportunity of a lifetime to prove himself a hero in the eyes of the woman he loved, and instead he had shown an incapacity to care even for himself.

It need not be said that he was not all to blame; yet, as he left the cottage, he could not help feeling that this dark-eyed, handsome young stranger would be, if he already was not, a rival for the hand and heart of the beautiful Maud.

It is generally believed that women have an intuition as to the character of men, and that they can see through them at a glance.

If this were at all true, we should not have so many sensible girls throwing themselves away on rascals.

Homer Chiswick proved in this, his first visit to the Rand cottage, that a man of the most degraded morals, if he be but handsome in person and brilliant in conversation, can win the confidence of the other sex, be they young or old.

Mrs. Rand, who rather prided herself on her judgment and ability to read character, said, after Chiswick had gone:

“That is a manly man; and so modest, too; not a word about himself, though it is easy to see that he is a gentleman by birth and education.”

Ned had not liked this man; but now when he considered that Chiswick had saved Maud's life, and that his mother spoke so highly of him, he blamed himself for what he thought his own prejudices, and he determined to make amends, like the brave, generous fellow he was, by showing the stranger more attention in the future.

As to Maud, she, of course, felt thankful to the young gentleman who saved her life; but as she looked at him she gradually forgot the incident that brought them together.

The man's strange, black eyes fascinated her, as the deep, glowing eyes of the serpent are said to fascinate birds, and draw them helplessly down to destruction.

Chiswick's low, rich voice played an important part in the spell which, from the first, he threw over Maud.

It was not till he had left that she could reason about this strange influence. Then the reaction set in, and she was seized with a chill, and the more she thought of this man, the stronger became the feeling of horror with which she considered him.

The next morning she was too ill to go to the office, but she felt, without saying so, that it was the rescuer and not the danger that affected her.

Donald Morton had made it a habit, when he came to the factory in the morning, to go into the artists' room and ask Maud how she was getting on.

He was surprised and disappointed at finding her

absent; and anxious to learn the cause, he sought out Ned.

Ned told about the accident and Chiswick's gallantry, and added:

"My sister will be all right by to-morrow, I hope."

Donald Morton was shocked.

"I must see Miss Rand as soon as possible and congratulate her, for if anything had happened to her, I should have felt it perhaps as keenly as you who are her brother."

Ned had noticed Morton's attention to Maud, and he did not like it.

He had not a high regard for his employer's purity of character, but now he imagined that the motives of that gentleman were, at least, of an honorable kind. So he said:

"My sister and my mother will appreciate your anxiety."

Morton had seen Chiswick at breakfast, and now he wondered why his secretary—ever ready to magnify himself—had not told him of the adventures of the night before. He had as much confidence in Chiswick as he had in any one, but this neglect was well calculated to shake it.

However, like the cunning man that he was, he kept his own counsel, and about the middle of the afternoon he drove out to Ned Rand's cottage, having in the meantime sent a magnificent bouquet and a note of congratulation to Maud.

Mrs. Rand, after exchanging salutations with Don-

ald Morton, for whom she had no great liking, left him alone with Maud in the cozy little parlor.

One thing can be said in Morton's favor, namely, he was a man of decision. Having made up his mind to do a thing, good or bad, he did it promptly and with all his might.

There could be no more favorable time than the present to tell Maud that he loved her and that he wanted her to be his wife.

With a bluntness that was only saved from brutality by a certain rude eloquence of manner, he said to Maud, after a brief general talk:

"Miss Rand, I am a middle-aged man. I am, I believe, very wealthy; but I have neither kith nor kin nor loved one to share my fortune. I have not much else to commend me, but this I can say with truth: From the moment I first saw you I loved you, and that love has dominated my life every day with greater force. You are young and beautiful, yet if I do not ask you I can never know if you could make up your mind to share my lot and be my wife. Do not answer me now," he continued, with increasing fervor. "I should expect a refusal, if you were to speak at this moment. Wait for a week before you make up your mind. Speak with your brother, and tell him that when you say 'yes,' I shall take him into partnership."

CHAPTER IX.

PREPARING FOR THE BURGLARS.

MAUD RAND was so confused by Morton's proposal that, had he insisted on an answer then and there, she would have been unable to give it, not because she had the slightest doubt about her feelings, or as to what the answer should be ; but the unexpectedness of the act, added to her illness, deprived her of her presence of mind and ready wit.

Fortunately Morton did not remain to confuse her with his undesirable presence.

As if alarmed at his own audacity, he hurried off after making his proposal, first telling Maud that he did not wish her to go to work until she was as strong as ever, and adding:

"I need not assure you, Miss Rand, that your wages will go on just the same, even if you are away a month."

After supper that evening Maud drew up her chair beside Ned, and sandwiching his big brown hand between her own so soft and white, she said:

"Brother, I shall not work in Mr. Morton's factory any more."

"You know, Maud, I never wished you to go

there," said Ned, adding another hand to the pile resting on his knee.

"It is not that, but I do not wish to see Mr. Morton again. He was here to-day, and I want to tell you why he came and all about it."

"He has made Maud an offer that a thousand girls would be ready to jump at," said Mrs. Rand. "But, rich or poor, old or young, my advice is, never marry a man that you can neither love nor respect."

"My feeling exactly, mother," said Maud. And then she averted her face and related to Ned all that had transpired during Morton's visit.

"My sister," said Ned, laying a hand lightly on the golden hair, "I can only think of your happiness in this matter. My own advancement is not a consideration. Mr. Morton, as my employer, treats me well; but I would rather work my fingers off at the hardest labor than that you should marry such a man."

"Why should I marry at all?" replied Maud. "Surely, neither you nor mother wants to get rid of me."

"No, indeed, darling," said Mrs. Rand.

Ned's only comment was to stroke the golden hair more rapidly.

"I would rather not think of marriage, brother, but live and work near you forever, if you will let me."

"Oh, he'll let you. That'll suit Ned and me," said Mrs. Rand, with a happy little laugh.

"Sister," said Ned, stooping over and kissing her forehead, "you shall do as your heart bids you. If ever you feel that you would be happier under the legal protection of another, I shall bless, but will not attempt to stay you, nor will my mother's love nor—nor mine be withdrawn from you. But let the matter drop. I am very happy as it is." And his fine face glowed with the light of love and hope.

Donald Morton's long career of success had led him to believe that failure was impossible.

He felt as certain as a man could feel that Maud Rand would accept his proposition when she came to consider the wealth and grandeur and the advance of her brother which would follow it.

That night he was in high spirits, and after supper he told Homer Chiswick what he had done, and the certainty of his success.

"I thought," he said, "that you would be delighted at my good luck, Chiswick. Why, man, you look as sad over it as if I had invited you to the funeral of a dear friend."

"And I have nearly as great a reason to feel sad," said Chiswick, after a solemn pause.

"Let us have the reason; out with it," said Donald, lighting a cigar and throwing himself back in his big easy-chair to listen.

Homer Chiswick guessed that this was coming, and that sooner or later Morton must know the exact relationship he sustained to Maud Rand.

The young man did not shrink from the thought

of an uncle's ignorantly marrying his niece. He was not troubled with moral convictions, but he now saw that his own plan demanded that he should tell Donald Morton all he had learned from Coots about Maud.

It was a delicate subject, but Chiswick was just the man to approach it gradually, and to present it carefully.

After a long preamble, he said:

"Coots is such a liar that one cannot tell what to believe, but, under the circumstances, I think it is right that you should know what he says about this young lady."

Chiswick was too shrewd to repeat all Coots had said about Morton's villainies; indeed, he cunningly kept that in the background, and satisfied himself by the plain statement:

"Coots says that Miss Rand is your niece, and that he can prove it."

This was said very quietly, but through the slits of his half-closed eyes Chiswick could see the startling effect of his words on his employer.

Morton sat suddenly upright, and the cigar fell unnoticed from his lips to the floor.

His hands clutched the sides of the chair, as if by a desperate effort he was trying to hold himself down.

His eyes had an expression of mingled horror and defiance, and he breathed like a man exhausted by a long climb.

At length he managed to hiss:

"It is an infernal lie! I have no niece! Rand is no kinsman of mine!"

"Of course I believe you, Mr. Morton," said Chiswick, his words and his feelings being opposites. "I told Coots that Rand was no relation of yours, and so his sister could not be."

"And did the rascal try to explain that away?"

"Yes. He said Ned Rand adopted the girl when her mother died ten or eleven years ago. He further said that the girl wore, and still wears, a peculiar locket, and that it contained the pictures of her father and mother; the former, he says, was your brother."

"Why did you not tell me this before?" asked Morton, striking the table and glaring at his secretary.

"Because I did not wish to trouble you about a statement which I believed to be false. But, sir, if you should prefer to hear all the idle gossip in circulation about yourself, and which is inevitable where one is rich and prominent, I shall tell it to you," said Chiswick, with the same quiet, imperturbable manner.

"Excuse me, Chiswick," said Morton, becoming suddenly calm, "but as a gnat can drive an elephant wild, so this wretch, Coots, annoys my life. I have been hoping that by this time you would have me rid of him."

"You can rid yourself of him, if you choose, Mr.

Morton, for, as I told you, he has planned to rob this house on Friday night. This is Tuesday. I can give you the alarm, for you know I am to let him in. I had prepared to have him arrested in the act and sent to the penitentiary, but if you should prefer to have him dead, the power to gratify your wish is in your own hands. As for myself, I have a horror of blood," said the impassive Chiswick.

"I am satisfied you are doing the very best you can for me, Mr. Chiswick. As to shedding human blood, why, I have as great a horror of it as yourself." Donald Morton rose and continued: "I have one of my bilious headaches, and I think I shall go to bed. Good night."

"Good night, sir," said Chiswick, rising and bowing with great deference.

The instant the secretary was alone he threw himself into Morton's chair and gave way to a fit of dumb laughter.

"Ho, ho, my good master!" he chuckled, "I know you now, and you think you know me. The lady shall be mine; and as to the fortune, why, it shall be hers; and my future will be as rosy and prosperous as I tried in vain to make the past."

But had Homer Chiswick known the revolution that had taken place in the heart and mind of his employer, it is doubtful if he would have felt quite so happy and confident.

Donald Morton reasoned that if Coots had told Chiswick about the niece, he had also told him every.

thing else. Believing this to be the case, he made up his mind that his secretary was deceiving him.

"Chiswick would be a more dangerous man than Coots," was the way Morton reasoned. "He is going to bring Coots to this house to rob it, and it is for me to kill or capture the fellow. It is clear to me that Chiswick has served my purpose; why not get rid of them both together?"

This thought entered and took possession of Donald Morton's mind.

He lacked Chiswick's talent for cool villainy, but he more than made up for it by his energy and singleness of purpose.

The next day he was rather glad when Ned Rand told him that Maud had made up her mind to change her employment.

That very afternoon he drove out to Ned's cottage, ostensibly to inquire after the health of the girl in whom his interest was intensified, though it had changed its character.

Maud met him with her customary grace and kindness, nor was she surprised when he expressed a desire to examine the curious heart of gold fastened to the chain about her neck.

"It contains the picture of my father and mother," said Maud, as she unclasped the chain. "I suppose you know," she added, as she handed it to him, "that I am an adopted child in this family."

"Yes; I was aware of that," said Donald Morton, the hand that held the locket trembling as his eyes

examined the likeness of the brother and the woman he had so deeply wronged.

“Quite a unique bit of work,” he said, handing back the locket.

He went home soon after this, satisfied that Chiswick had told the truth and more than ever convinced that he had learned too much.

Another crisis had come in the rich man's affairs, and to meet it he felt that Coots and his secretary must be put out of the way at any cost.

CHAPTER X.

A NIGHT ALARM.

DONALD MORTON was convinced that neither Maud Rand nor her adopted mother nor brother had the least suspicion that she was his niece, nor that she was the owner by right of the greater part of that vast estate that made him the man of mark he was.

While Maud was ignorant of her rights, Donald Morton was quite willing that she should live unharmed.

But so long as there were those living who knew of his and her past, so long there was danger.

From a feeling of confidence in, if not of liking for, Chiswick, within the short space of three days Morton came to hate and fear him as he never had hated or feared Coots.

But he took care to keep this to himself.

He only spoke once again to Chiswick about Maud, and then it was to regret that she had left his employ.

"For," he said, "she is a charming young lady, and one of the very best designers I ever had in my service."

On his part, Chiswick fully explained his understanding with Coots.

"He is to come here at midnight, and I am to let him in. He hopes to find money and jewelry in the safe, but his real object is to secure certain papers which he imagines will be of use to him. It is for you to say whether we shall arrest him or—shoot him," said Chiswick, in the cool, impassive way that distinguished him.

"Let me think about it," was Morton's reply.

And he not only did think about it, but he prepared himself for the event by going into a kind of training.

He procured two pistols. He had been quite an expert with the weapon in his younger days. In his own room, before going to bed, he would practice leaping suddenly up and aiming at an imaginary robber.

He would go through the motions of shooting at one in front and the other behind, and this he repeated, with a pistol in each hand, till he had fired off all his cartridges—in imagination.

By the evening of the contemplated burglary he had fully made up his mind to give Chiswick and Coots a similar reception.

Two days before this he had placed a detective on Chiswick's track.

"I fear the young man is getting into bad company, and I want him shadowed when away from my house."

This was Morton's instruction to the detective.

He knew that the result would be to show that

Chiswick was the companion of Coots and other thieves; so that, if he were killed at the time of the burglary, it could be proved that he was in league with the ex-convict, and had actually let him into the house.

Chiswick had not a particle of faith in the integrity of his employer.

By this time he had come to the conclusion that Donald Morton was a heartless villain, but this only kept alive his admiration for the man.

He also thought that Morton was a coward, and this fact led him to believe that Coots would not be shot at. He never suspected—and his nature was most suspicious—that his own life was in danger.

Coots had come to have faith in Chiswick. He admired him, as ignorant men admire intelligent associates, and as weak men admire strong ones.

He knew that Push had become devoted to Chiswick; and he saw, with delight, that his young associate was paying a great deal of attention to Polly.

“Chiswick will be rich after a bit,” Coots said to his wife, “an’ if him an’ Polly was to strike up a match, I think it’d be a good one.”

“Well, I don’t,” said Mrs. Wogley, in her blunt way. “Besides which, Polly’s heart’s sot on another an’ a better man.”

“An’ who might that better man be?”

“If you had any eyes in yer head, Coots, ye’d see that the better man’s Ned Rand. But, be that

as it may, let me tell you, I ain't got no use for this Chiswick. I uster think that you was just 'bout as bad a man as ever lived, but since seein' yer new pal I've changed my mind; he's about a thousain times wuss'n you;" and with this frank opinion Mrs. Wogley turned away from her husband.

At length the night for the "burglary" arrived.

Coots was the only man concerned who was honestly carrying out his part of the scheme, that is, if the word "honestly" be admissible in such a connection.

He entered into this plan at the suggestion of his "pal," in order to secure papers that would be of use to Chiswick, but which he did not know enough to use to his own advantage.

With Chiswick to let him in, and to aid him in getting into the safe, Coots anticipated no trouble. He did not even look at the understanding as at all criminal; for, with his low moral standard, he could not imagine it stealing to take from a man that of which he had become unlawfully possessed.

Coots believed himself to be a very bad man. If anything in his wretched character could give it one commendable feature, it was the fact he was not a hypocrite.

"When I know I'm a snake an' nothin' else," he would say to his wife and cronies, "why should I try to make folks, with two good eyes in their heads, believe I'm a innocent, cooin' dove?"

But while Coots retained a certain sort of fidelity

to his word, Chiswick had not the slightest conception of that feeling which is said to create a sense of "honor even among thieves."

Coots had served his purpose, and he was now quite as eager as Morton to have the fellow out of the way, and whether he was shot or imprisoned, it mattered not to him.

Chiswick had already possessed himself of either copies or the originals of such papers as he found in the safe, and which he believed would be of use to him.

He was now ready to break with Morton, and to begin a daring campaign on his own account, the first important step in which would be to win and wed the beautiful Maud Rand.

But the oldest, coarsest, and most resolute of this trio of criminals was Donald Morton.

As a man will fight and struggle harder to maintain his old home against assailants than to found a new one, so Morton, from his stronger vantage ground, was ready to do battle against all who threatened him.

That Friday night, and about two hours before the expected coming of the wretched Coots, Morton and Chiswick had what each said was "a very clear understanding of the case."

"I have about made up my mind to summon an officer," said Morton. "I can signal the district messenger office through an instrument near the head of my bed, and this I shall do as soon as I hear

the noise; and I think I shall call for you to help me."

"Oh! that'd never do," said Chiswick. "You see, Coots believes that I am no longer in your employ. You forget that I am to meet Coots outside, and enter by means of my dead-latch key."

"Oh, yes; to be sure! Ah! Chiswick, you have a better head for such matters than I have," said Morton, highly delighted with this arrangement.

Soon after this Chiswick went out to meet Coots at a rendezvous not far away. He would have walked along with a less jaunty air had he known there was a detective on his track.

Morton went to the room, locked the door, lowered the blinds, and then loaded the two revolvers.

He heard Mrs. Belton going along the hall outside, and he called to her:

"Is the house closed up, Mrs. Belton?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I always see to that last thing," replied the old housekeeper.

"I see by the papers that there have been a great many burglaries of late. We cannot be too careful."

"Very true, sir; but I can't well see how we could be more careful, unless we were to keep the house filled with police and private watchmen."

"Even those do not avail at times. Good night, Mrs. Belton."

"Good night, sir," repeated the old lady, as, candle

in hand, she went up to her own room, having seen that all the servants had preceded her.

The instant she was out of hearing, Donald Morton took off his slippers and crept down stairs.

He opened all the doors leading to the library. In this room a dim light was always kept burning during the night.

This done, Morton returned to his own room and prepared for bed, but instead of lying down he put on a wrapper, and then, with a pistol in each hand, he crept back to the library and concealed himself in a corner, shaded on one side by a bookcase and in front by a heavy curtain.

In his anxiety to be ready, he went into hiding a half hour before the appointed time.

Hitherto he had not been troubled with a cough, nor had he ever shown a tendency to sneeze; but as he crouched down in that corner he had to cough or strangle.

It took him a full half-hour to control his nerves, which he did by rising and walking about the room.

When again he went into hiding behind the curtain, he felt sure that he could remain there in silence for any length of time.

He had resumed his position but a few minutes when the clock on the mantel struck twelve.

The sound had hardly died out when he heard the front door opening and closing.

In a few seconds Chiswick entered the library, turned up the light a little higher and looked about

him. Satisfied with the inspection, he took off his boots and went to the back of the house, where he was to admit Coots through a window.

To Morton it seemed that the secretary had been gone an age, and he was beginning to feel like coughing again, when Chiswick reappeared, leading in Coots.

"Now, old fellow," whispered Chiswick, "I'll open the outer door for you, but the secret drawer of the safe you must work yourself, and while you are at it I'll watch."

"All right," said Coots, as he set a basket containing burglars' tools on the table.

Chiswick quickly opened the safe and pointed to the inner, central drawer, which he told Coots held the desired papers.

"Now I'll watch," said Chiswick.

But before he could take a step two pistol shots rang out, followed by shouts of alarm and other shots at close range.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT FOLLOWED THE "BURGLARY."

IN the midst of the shooting and shouting the light in the library was extinguished. The gas was turned off by either Chiswick or Coots, Morton could never tell which, but he did know that it was not the man who put out the light that fired into the corner.

The noise not only alarmed Mrs. Belton and the servants, but it was heard on the street by the drowsy policemen, and soon there came a loud pounding on the front door.

One of the servants lit the hall lamp and opened the door, when the officers ran in.

Soon there were lights burning in all the lower rooms; and in the library Donald Morton was found lying on the floor with a pistol in his right hand, and the blood flowing down his face from a wound in his head.

He looked to be dead, and in their horror at the sight, even the officers forgot to search for the perpetrators of what they considered a horrible murder.

Leaving Morton to the anxious care of his servants and the ever-increasing crowd of officers, let us fol-

low the two men with whom he had been playing such a desperate game of cross-purposes.

Morton's first shot was aimed at Chiswick, and the instant that the young man felt the stinging pain along his side, he turned and realized the perfidy of his employer.

Quick as a flash, Chiswick leaped forward and turned out the light, but, before he had accomplished this, Coots had drawn a pistol and fired at the man in the corner.

Coots, accustomed to act in such ordeals, retained his presence of mind.

He was a giant in strength, and seizing his companion by the arm, he whispered:

"We must fly! The game's up for the present!"

"Leave me; I'm wounded," said Chiswick, who had no dread of being captured.

But Coots, thief though he was, had still a rough kind of loyalty, that might have been admirable under other circumstances.

"I'll take you through or die a-tryin'," he said.

Chiswick was too weak to resist; indeed, he fainted and had no recollection of what happened till he woke up in a close carriage that was being driven along at a frightful speed.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"In a kerridge beyond the reach of the cops," said Coots.

"How did we get here?"

"I carried you to the back lane. Without tellin'

you anything about it, I had a friend there with this rig; an' lucky it was for us that he was on hand, for long before this the whole city's alarmed. How do you feel, ole man?"

"I don't think any bones are broken, and I seem to breathe all right. I wish you could get me to a doctor," said Chiswick, who at heart was anything but brave.

"We'll be at Gringer's Den in a few minutes. Don't give way," said Coots, after putting his head out of the carriage to see where they were.

"Who is Gringer?"

"A man of our kind. He uster be a doctor, but the biz didn't have enough excitement for him. Hello! Here we are!" exclaimed Coots, as the carriage came to a halt before a long, low house, at the back of which was a dark forest, and to the front the waters of Long Island Sound.

Though it was now very late at night, or rather early in the morning, with no sign of life about the building, a peculiar rap from the driver, followed by a whistle from Coots, resulted in the opening of a door, through which lances of light shot into the darkness.

"Who is it?" asked a man in the door.

"Friends," replied Coots.

"How shall I know you to be friends?"

"By our having a sign and a password," said Coots.

"Can you give us the sign and word?" asked the man.

"I can."

Coots advanced, took the hand of the man in the door, and, as he grasped it, he bent forward and whispered:

"Down with the law."

"Right," said the man in the door, who was no other than "Doctor" Gringer, the proprietor of this thieves' den. "Enter, friends. Here all such are welcome."

Coots returned to the carriage, and helped Chiswick into the house.

Gringer conducted them through a room in which were many rough-looking men, to a small apartment at the further end of the building.

"You've got it pretty bad," said Gringer, as, in obedience to Coots's request, he examined Chiswick's wound.

"Any danger?" asked Chiswick nervously.

"If I knew you well enough, I might be able to say. Men have died of less wounds, and survived worst ones. But you are young, and look as if you should pull through. The best medicine is pluck, and a good constitution is better than all the doctors," said Gringer, as he proceeded, in a cool, professional way, to probe for the ball, which had entered Chiswick's side, in a direct line with his heart, showing that the man who fired the bullet meant to kill.

Chiswick was now convinced of Morton's perfidy, but he kept his knowledge to himself, nor did he

need Coots's assurance that Morton would not attempt to hunt them down, to feel secure from pursuit.

But there was another matter that preyed on Chiswick's mind, and made him somewhat indifferent to the pain of his wound, which, with his highly sensitive organization, he would have otherwise felt very keenly—that was the people with whom he would be forced to live for some time.

He did not attempt to deceive himself with the belief that he was one bit better than the meanest thief in this den of outlaws, but he saw that such an association, if known to the world, would tell against him when he came to play what he called his "high trump card."

"You may have to stay here for a month," said Gringer, in reply to Chiswick's question. "But that mustn't frighten you. Why, I've had men so badly cut up that they had to stay with me a year before they got out."

"That must have taken a pile of money?"

"So it did, Brother Chiswick; but if you haven't got the rhino, there won't be wanting friends to see you through," said Gringer, adding, as he turned to leave the room: "Try to sleep. After all, that's better than all the other medicines put together. Rid your mind of all trouble, and snooze."

This was excellent advice, but in times of great anxiety the thoughts are independent of the will, and it is as impossible to be untroubled as it would

be for a lake to remain unruffled under the lash of a cyclone.

While Chiswick lay in the dark room of the thieves' den, planning vengeance against Morton, Morton reclined on his own bed, surrounded by a half-score of the best doctors in the city.

It did not take those learned men long to discover that Morton's wound "came within a quarter of an inch of piercing his brain." But as the bullet had produced only a shock and temporary unconsciousness, the rich man was soon restored to his senses.

"You'll be all right in a few days, Mr. Morton," said one of the surgeons.

"And it is to be hoped the wretches who attempted your murder will be caught," said another.

"I am here as a detective," said a quiet, smooth-faced man, approaching the bed and throwing back the lapel of his coat to exhibit his badge. "Permit me to ask, Mr. Morton, if you saw the man who shot you?"

"I saw two or three men," said Morton, slowly, "but the light was so indistinct that I could not see their faces, and so I do not know which of them shot me."

"Do you think you could recognize any of the burglars if you saw them again?" asked Detective Chambers.

"No; I am sure I could not."

"Could you give me any description of them?"

"Not the slightest. I heard the noise, rushed

down from my room, saw the men at the safe, fired, and was shot myself, after which I can remember nothing," said Morton, waving his hand to indicate that he did not wish to talk any more.

The doctors indorsed this wish, so Mr. Chambers, the well-known detective, left the room with the feeling that the man who was cool and brave enough to seek out and attack the burglars ought to be able to remember something about them.

The doctor best known to Donald Morton, and who might be called his "family physician," assured him that all he needed was rest, and, promising to call early on the morrow, he left with his professional brethren.

Although enjoined to go to sleep, Donald Morton found this as difficult as Chiswick did to follow Gringer's advice.

He questioned Mrs. Belton, but she declared that neither she nor the servants heard anything till the pistol shots were fired.

"Then," she said, "I recalled your last words to me about the burglars. I sprang out of bed. Annie, my niece, was sleeping with me; and we both screamed for dear life, and ran down to where the police were knocking at the door."

"And you are sure you didn't see the burglars?"

"No more, Mr. Morton, than if the floors beneath their feet had opened and swallowed them up."

"Well, let the wretches go. I am sure I hurt some

of them. Now I'll try and get some sleep," said Morton.

The old housekeeper left the room, and he did try to sleep, but, though the eyes were closed, the brain was busy.

He cursed himself for the timidity that made his arm so unsteady. He could have killed the men who, he thought, stood between him and perfect happiness, if he had only kept his nerve.

What would be the result now?

He asked himself this question again and again, without being able to find an answer.

He could not arrest either Coots or Chiswick, and the latter was the man of whom he stood most in dread.

"If Maud Rand was dead, that would settle it." This he repeated over and over to himself, and the more he considered it, the more firmly convinced he became that his only safety lay in her death or banishment.

Morton had that dread of and respect for Ned Rand which mean and cowardly natures have for noble ones.

So long as Ned Rand had life and strength, his adopted sister would be sure of a protector.

Ned Rand must be rendered powerless.

To discharge him would be an easy matter, and this Donald Morton decided to do at once.

He could prevent his being employed in other establishments by a process known to most employers.

Not only this, but Donald Morton could and would make the young man homeless.

Ned had purchased the cottage from Morton, paying some cash, and giving a mortgage for the balance, which he was paying off from his savings.

This mortgage was so drawn up that Morton could foreclose it at any time, and he resolved to do it as soon as possible.

It must not be imagined that Morton had any hate for Ned Rand. Indeed, he admired him as a citizen and a mechanic, but the young man was in his way, and might become a power to destroy him if he were not crushed in time.

The desperate man gave no thought to the value of the lives or characters of a thousand others, so that he saved himself.

After so long a success he could not afford to be beaten.

He must win, though it took half—yes, all—his ill-gotten gains; but the more he thought this over, the more convinced he became that he needed a cool, unscrupulous man, like Chiswick, to help him; and having faith in the power of money, he resolved to seek out such a person at once.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PERSECUTION BEGINS.

“THE attempt to rob the mansion of Mr. Donald Morton” got into the papers, and so became the talk of the town.

It was rumored that the guilty parties were men whom Mr. Morton had befriended, and who were still in his employ.

“It is believed,” said one newspaper, “that Mr. Morton knows at least one of the criminals, but a mistaken goodness of heart prevents his prosecuting.”

When asked about his private secretary, Morton explained his absence by saying he had gone away on a vacation, so that all the people in the rich man’s employ began to wonder to which one of their number suspicion attached.

Ned Rand heard of the robbery, as a matter of course, but, beyond regretting that his employer had been injured, and that the rascals escaped, he gave no great thought to the matter.

He always spent his spare hours in that pleasantest place in the world to him—home.

He left at a certain minute in the morning, and returned at a certain minute in the evening, with more than the punctuality of the average clock.

The surprise of his mother and Maud was therefore very great when Ned appeared one day at noon in the cottage porch, carrying a bundle in which were the clothes he wore when working at the factory.

"Are you sick, my boy?" was Mrs. Rand's salutation, as she kissed him, and scanned his expressive face, which, as he was a very poor actor, showed his feelings all the more for his efforts to look cheerful.

"No," said Ned; "I am in excellent health, dear mother, and as I am young, strong, and a good mechanic, I can't see why I should be downhearted because I find myself out of a job."

"Then you are discharged?" said Maud, in surprise.

"Yes, sister; Mr. Morton appeared at the factory to-day for the first time since his injury, and the very first thing he did was to send for me, and tell me my services were no longer required."

"And what reason did he assign?" asked Maud, her heart telling her that she was indirectly responsible for this misfortune.

"I urged him to tell me why I was discharged, and his reply was, 'I can fill your place with a better and cheaper man.' Of course, I could not argue against such business logic, so I said, 'All right, sir; you will at least give me a letter saying how long I have been in your employ, and how I have performed my duties during that time.'"

"And what answer did he make?" asked Mrs. Rand.

“He replied that he never gave such letters to people leaving his service; but that I was free to refer any one, from whom I sought employment, to him. Rather queer treatment from a man who, a few weeks ago, spoke of taking me into partnership. But,” continued Ned, with a laugh, and a hand extended to Maud, “a million times better be as we are than the partnership with the conditions it implied.”

His heartiness of manner and his confidence in himself, after the first shock, had a cheering effect on his mother and Maud.

The latter said, as she came over and took her favorite position behind Ned’s chair, with her little hands resting on his broad shoulders:

“At heart, dear brother, I am glad you are free from that man. From the first, despite my every effort to like, I have loathed him. The world would be scarcely worth living in if our success depended on working for one man. There is plenty for us to do, and as we are not afraid of work, I think we can do it. Only this morning I received an offer to teach drawing at Professor Colville’s school, and I shall write at once and accept the place. As for you, why, every decorative paper establishment in the country will be competing for you, when it is known your services are in the market.”

Ned would have started out that afternoon to look for work, but his mother and Maud forbade it.

“It is the first half-holiday you have had since the

fourth of July," said Maud, "and I propose that you and I take the boat and go a-fishing."

"There's nothing like fishing," added Mrs. Rand, "to soothe the nerves; at least I've heard my father say so, and he had the evenest temper of any man that ever lived."

Being thus solicited and advised, Ned agreed to row down to the entrance of the Sound with Maud and try their luck at fishing.

If not a fish was caught, or even a bite had, still the hours spent with her were the happiest of his life; and so, indifferent as to the success of the ostensible object of their trip, he took the oars, and with Maud in the stern steering, they sped down the river.

As they passed the Neptune House they were hailed by Polly Wogley, and from her gestures it was evident that she wished to have a talk at closer range.

"Why, where have you both been? I ain't seed you for ever so long," said Polly, as Ned brought the skiff alongside the float.

"I was in hopes you would be up to see me," said Maud, reaching up her hand to the delighted Polly.

"And I was hoping the same," said Ned, taking the other hand and so increasing the expression of delight on her wholesome face.

"I couldn't get off; had so much to do," said Polly, waving her hand at the flag fluttering above her floating home. "But I wanted to ask Mr. Rand if he's seen anything of Chiswick of late?"

"I have not," replied Ned; "but I heard that he was off spending his vacation."

"His vacation?" repeated Polly.

"Yes. Mr. Morton gives his clerks a week off every year."

"But is he still with Morton?"

"I believe so."

"Well, that's kinder funny," said Polly, folding her red arms and looking abstractedly at the other bank.

As she showed no disposition to explain why she thought this "funny," Ned did not ask her, but with another invitation from Maud to Polly to call at the cottage when she had time, he moved away.

They had a pleasant trip down, and finding the tide on the turn at the place where they came to an anchor, they had excellent fishing.

When about to return, Maud pointed to a long, low house, backed by a dark forest, and seemingly constructed of a part of the immense rocks that flanked it on the east and west, and said:

"I have not been able to keep my eyes off that weird-looking place. Do you know anything about it?"

"I must confess I do not," replied Ned; "but judging from the shadows about the place, the occupants, if it has any, are not very fond of sunlight."

How could they know that, from the very minute they came to anchor until Ned took the oars to row back, Chiswick, from a room in one end of the

gloomy building, had been watching them through a spy-glass?

It is not for us to attempt the explanation of a phenomenon the occurrence of which science admits without being able to account for it, but it is very certain that Maud was affected by her proximity to Chiswick; for though she recalled him with a shudder, she could not banish him from her mind so long as the boat was at anchor, but as soon as Ned took the oars and began to pull homeward the phantom left her mind, as a black cloud passes from the face of the sun.

As they passed the Neptune House, Polly hailed them again to ask, "What luck?" and Ned, as he turned to reply, saw through the open door of the main room Coots and his son Push sitting with a table between them.

After supper that evening, Edgar Moore, who since the accident had not been so frequent a visitor, called.

Of late the young man's mind had been much troubled; and while his manner to Maud was as tender and chivalric as ever, it was evident that his ardor had been checked, if not very much dampened, by some outside influence.

He remained about an hour, and when he rose to go he asked Ned to walk as far as the street cars with him, saying:

"We can talk over some matters as we go along."

When they were away from the cottage, Edgar took Ned's arm, and said, as they went slowly on:

"I have heard that you were discharged from Morton's."

"You did not hear it from me," said Ned; "for while I do not like change, yet the man's a slave who is bound to one master. Mr. Morton can get the work done by a cheaper man, and I have no right to object, nor do I think I have any great reason to feel sad."

"I hope not," said Edgar Moore thoughtfully. "I learned the facts from Mr. Morton this afternoon; but before we talk about him, let me say something about myself."

"A much pleasanter subject," laughed Ned, in a tremulous voice, that showed how deeply he was moved.

Young Moore went on to tell of his profound love for Maud, and his sublime confidence that she loved him in return.

"I am an only child," he continued, "and, as you know, my parents are wealthy, and I love and honor them. Their existence is wrapped up in me, and anything like disobedience on my part would shorten their lives. I have told them the story of Maud's life as I learned it from her own dear lips, and I have tried to show them how inseparably all my future, if it is to be happy, is linked with hers. But birth and position stand before everything else with them, and they have set their faces against receiving the only one on earth that I can make my wife."

"Some parents will do such things," coughed Ned.

"But, under the circumstances, what would you advise?"

"I am afraid," said Ned, slowly, "that this is a case in which I am not competent to advise. Maud's happiness is, next to the inborn sense of duty due the best mother in the world, the first object of my life. Long years ago, when she was a helpless child, I took her into my heart, and she has grown there till she has become its greater, its better part. You are a man of full age, and able for yourself to see the lines of your duty. Find them and follow them, and if I can see they are to lead to Maud's happiness, I will stand by you if it costs me my life."

"God bless you, Rand," said Edgar, pressing the hand on which he leant, but unable to see or to understand the other's emotion.

When nearing the place where the street cars stopped, Edgar Moore brought his companion to a halt, and continued, with a changed manner:

"And now, as you were the cause, you will no doubt be eager to learn why Morton wanted to see me this afternoon."

"I have no fear of anything he may say; but naturally enough I am anxious to know why he should want to see you about me," said Ned.

"He told me that he held a mortgage on your cottage," said Edgar, "and, as a lawyer, he wanted me to foreclose it at once, if you did not pay what is due."

CHAPTER XIII.

INCREASING TRIALS BRAVELY MET.

NED RAND had not had time to think about the mortgage for thirty-seven hundred dollars, still due on his cottage and the two lots on which it was built.

He had purchased it about three years before, at what he considered a low price, and, as he believed, on very reasonable terms, from Donald Morton.

His plan had been to set aside each month forty dollars from his salary of one hundred and twenty; and in this way, with the money on hand when the purchase was made, he was able to pay off one-half the amount with the interest at five per cent. on the balance.

The mortgage was so drawn that at any time, after two years, Donald Morton could foreclose.

Ned objected to this at the time, but his employer allayed his fears by assuring him that it was simply a matter of form, and that it would make no difference, if he did not pay for twenty years, so long as the interest did not get in arrears.

"If Mr. Morton wants to foreclose," said Ned, startled by what Edgar Moore told him, "I do not see how I can well prevent him. I have only his

verbal promise that all would be right till I paid the balance in my own way, and I must confess that I am at a loss to account for his conduct."

"He is a hard, cruel man to those whom he does not like," said Edgar Moore.

"But I have given him no reason to dislike me."

"Of that I am very sure; but it is certain that he imagines you have wronged him in some way—"

"Wronged him!" repeated Ned; and he was on the point of telling about Morton's offer of marriage to Maud, but he checked himself and added: "The wrong any man suffers at my hands must certainly be imaginary."

"I was about to say that I have not of my own the amount which you will need to save your home," continued Edgar Moore. "But the day after to-morrow a wealthy bachelor friend of mine, now in Washington, will return to the city, and I can get him to take up the mortgage, and arrange for you to make him a new one on your own terms. I wanted you to know how Morton stood toward you, and the professional part he wants me to play. But I can assure you, you have no reason to feel uneasy."

Ned thanked the young lawyer, and, with a heavier heart than he had carried for many a year, he returned to the cottage; but as neither his mother nor Maud could help him with this new trouble, he kept it to himself.

There is an adage that "It never rains but it

pours," and still another which says that "Misfortunes come in droves."

Ned Rand's case went to prove that there was much truth in these sayings.

There were in New York and Brooklyn a number of firms that manufactured wall papers, and these Ned made up his mind to visit in turn the next day.

From force of habit he was up very early; and, when he was about to start off, his mother and Maud kissed him and wished him good luck in so earnest a way as to make him feel that failure was out of the question.

Edgar Moore's promise to attend to the mortgage took a great load off Ned's mind, though it did not prevent his asking himself at every turn:

"What has brought about this sudden change in Mr. Morton?"

He could not answer this; but it was a great comfort for him to know that he was not himself in any way to blame for Morton's sudden hate.

The first place he went to was a factory, the proprietor of which, not six months before, had offered him a larger salary if he would leave Morton's employ.

This man met Ned very coldly, and told him there was no vacancy in his establishment.

"Nor," said he, in reply to Ned's question, "do I know of any factory where *you* can get a place."

Ned did not notice the emphasis the man put on the "*you*." How could he know that the rumor had

already spread, far and wide, that he was suspected of having had a hand in the attempted burglary of Morton's house?

The newspapers, that said that Mr. Morton suspected some trusted people in his own employ, also announced Ned's discharge, and it was done in an insinuating way far more damaging than a direct accusation.

To save car fare—for the payments on the cottage prevented his ever having much money ahead—Ned walked from place to place in the hope of finding work.

Everywhere he was met with the same abrupt refusals.

Even the workmen of his acquaintance whom he met treated him with a coldness that perplexed and pained him, though he was too proud to ask the cause of the change.

It was after the usual hour when he reached home, his feet sore and his brave heart heavier than he would be willing to confess even to himself.

He did not need to tell his mother and Maud that he had not been successful. They read it in his expressive face the instant he opened the door.

As if to banish his disappointment, Maud took both his hands and cried out joyously:

“Oh, Brother Ned, congratulate me!”

“Upon my word, Maud, I should congratulate myself,” said Ned, his cares vanishing at sight of her beautiful face, “at having you and mother to make

me feel that if not so rich as Morton, I have ten thousand more reasons for being happy."

"Do I look like a professor, brother?" asked Maud, drawing up her exquisite, lithe form and trying to look very dignified.

"Well, sister," said Ned, unable to keep from laughing, "at a venture, I should say that you do not look like a professor."

"Yet I am one to-day. I signed articles of agreement that make me professor of drawing and designing at the Colville Institute; compensation fifty dollars a month, and Saturdays all to myself. I go to work—that's a better phrase than 'I assume the duties of the position'—to-morrow. So now, you dear, old, brave boy, we'll have supper and then some music, and we'll just be as happy as if, by some miracle, we suddenly found ourselves as rich as Donald Morton."

"Which we wouldn't want to be if we had, at the same time, to be as mean," said Mrs. Rand.

There was no resisting the contagious spirits of Maud and his mother, and so, for the rest of the evening, Ned was as happy as if no break or fall had come to the deep, smooth current of his life.

The next morning Maud, with a brave, hopeful heart, went off to work, and Ned went off to seek work.

He decided to try Brooklyn, where there were several large factories, such as he had been accustomed to superintend.

He did not expect now to find such a place and at such a salary as he had recently been forced to surrender; but his mind was made up to take any place that offered, for the thought of being idle filled him with horror. He gave two days to Brooklyn, but without getting any more encouragement than he had in New York.

Trade was brisk; skilled workmen were in demand, and—he could not understand it.

Perplexed and just the least bit discouraged, Ned was going over the East River on the Thirty-second Street ferry to New York, when he heard his name called, and looking up he saw Coots standing before him.

Ned was aware that this man was on intimate terms with Donald Morton, but beyond that he knew absolutely nothing about him, save that he was personally repulsive.

There were times when Ned watched Coots, wondering the while where he had seen him before, and associating him in his mind with Maud, without being at all able to tell where he had met him in the long-gone past, or if he had ever seen him before he appeared so suddenly and mysteriously at Morton's factory.

"Sorry to hear you're out of a job," said Coots, as he took a seat beside Ned.

"Thanks for your sympathy," said Ned, with a manner which, without being at all rude, plainly showed that he was not eager to talk.

"That's the way with Morton," continued Coots, not at all abashed. "Just as soon as he thinks a man is in his way he goes to work and kicks him out of it. But, if you knew just what I know"—here Coots stopped and shook with dumb laughter—"you'd make Donald Morton the sickest man between Canada and the Gulf."

"But I have no desire to make him sick," said Ned.

"Well, blow me, but that's funny!"

"I can't see where the fun comes in."

"Why, I'll tell you where the fun comes in. It comes in in a man's not bein' ready to strike back at the feller that kicks him out of work, an' then keeps him out of work by a blastin' of his character an' a blackenin' of his good name. An' that's just what Donald Morton has done an' is a-doin' to you."

"I don't understand you," said Ned.

"I didn't suppose you would; but, if you don't object, I'll make myself plainer."

"If you can tell me anything about myself that I do not know, I shall be glad to listen."

"I won't pretend to tell you anythink about yersel that you don't know, but I can tell you what Donald Morton is trying to make other people believe about you. It's a cussed shame that it ain't stopped."

"What is that?"

"Why, that you are mixed up with the gang that tried to rob his house, an' which, he sez, shot him.

Oh, don't get mad. I'm yer friend so far that I want you to know the truth about these stories, an' I'm prepared to prove what I say."

Coots took a number of newspaper clippings from an old pocket-book, and handing them in regular order to Ned, asked him to read.

These extracts told of the robbery and shooting, and said very plainly that Mr. Morton suspected some of his most trusted employees, but that he was too generous to prosecute.

"Perhaps," read one statement, "we shall learn who the guilty parties are by the discharges Mr. Morton must soon make."

Following this, Coots handed Ned a clipping, which read:

"Edward Rand, for many years the capable superintendent of Morton's great paper factory, and his most trusted lieutenant, has been discharged. There is a great mystery about this, and Mr. Morton owes it to justice to let the public into his secret."

"My God!" exclaimed Ned, as the fragment of paper fluttered from his hand to the cabin floor.

"Do you understand what them papers say?" asked Coots.

"Yes; only too well."

"They're agin you?"

"Yes."

"An' tryin' to make believe you are a thief? Don't scowl at me. It ain't my doin's."

"Whose, then?"

"Ned Rand, can't you guess?"

"If I could, I wouldn't ask you."

"It's Morton."

"How do you know?"

"Ah, Mr. Rand, if I was to tell you that, I'd have to tell you all," said Coots, smacking his lips and shaking his head.

"To tell me all?" repeated Ned.

"Yes, everything from the beginning to the end. About you, an' about Morton, an' more particular about *her*."

"Who do you mean by 'her'?"

"Your adopted sister."

"And what do you know about her that I should not know?" asked Ned, indignantly.

"Nothin' that ain't to her credit and that you shouldn't know; but this ain't the time nor place. Oh, I can read you, an' I know you ain't got no faith in me, but some day you'll recall the hint I'm a givin' you now, an' wonder why you didn't guess the whole truth before," said Coots, with a manner that was at once impressive and oracular.

Ned did not speak during the rest of the passage to the New York side.

He did not like this man, and he did not believe that he had half the knowledge he pretended to, yet he could not deny that Coots had been meeting Donald Morton as an equal.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER SEVERE BLOW.

COOTS did not part company with Ned Rand till they reached the banks of the Harlem river.

On the way he said, more than once:

“Morton has turned agin you: now you ought to turn agin him.”

Ned attempted no comment. He was so stunned by the revelation made to him by Coots, and the truth of which became more evident every moment, that he could think of nothing else.

He now saw a good reason for the cold reception he had met with, not only from the proprietors of factories, but from his fellow-workmen.

A feeling of horror, such as a guilty man never experienced, chilled Ned's heart; and as he hurried along he imagined that every one he saw looked at him, and said, mentally:

“There goes the man that tried to rob and murder his employer.”

“Mebbe some day I'll put you on Morton's track,” said Coots, when they had reached a point where their paths parted. “In the meantime watch out for him; he means to get you out of the way.”

"But why should he mean to get me out of the way?" asked Ned.

"Ah! I wish I could tell you; but I can't."

Coots waved his hand and disappeared down the river bank in the direction of the Neptune House.

It was near dark when Ned got back to the cottage, and as he went up through the little flower garden that had given him such delight in the past, he saw Maud standing framed like a beautiful picture in the vine-covered porch.

"Poor boy!" she exclaimed, as she ran to meet him with extended hands. "You look very tired."

"I must confess, Maud, I was a bit tired till I got within sight of home," said Ned, retaining her hand as they went up the steps; "but I am all right again."

His mother greeted him as usual, but he could see that there was some new trouble on her mind.

He followed her into the kitchen, and in a whisper asked her what had happened since he left.

"I cannot tell you now, dear Ned," said his mother. "Wait till Maud has gone to bed."

With increasing anxiety Ned waited until Maud had retired, and then his mother came to him on tip-toe, and whispered, as she took his hand and sat down beside him:

"Did you hear anything about the mortgage, Ned?"

"The mortgage?" he repeated, with a gasp.

"Yes, my boy."

He told her what Edgar Moore had said, and of his promise to have a friend assume the claim.

"I am very much afraid," said Mrs. Rand, "that Mr. Moore has forgotten all about his promise."

"What makes you think so?"

"A man came here this afternoon and demanded the money. I told him you were away, and I further explained that I was very sure that you could not pay at this time. Then he sat down and wrote a letter to you, which he left with me. Here it is;" and his mother took the letter from her pocket and handed it to him.

Ned tore off the envelope and read aloud:

"EDWARD RAND, ESQ.—*Dear Sir:* As attorney in the case, my client, Mr. Donald Morton, desired me to call here to-day and make a demand for the sum of three thousand seven hundred dollars (\$3,700) due on a mortgage made to him by you three years ago, and covering the lots and premises known as 'Lilac Villa,' in the district of Harlem, Westchester county, New York.

"I am very sorry that you are not present to-day, for I am ordered to foreclose at half-past ten to-morrow morning, if you are not then prepared to pay the sum, now so long overdue.

"Regretting that there is no other alternative left me, I am,
dear sir, Yours truly, PETER GURLY,

"October 9, 1870.

"Attorney in the case."

"It is very clear to me that Mr. Moore has forgot all about his promise," said Mrs. Rand, when her son had read over this startling communication a second time.

"I don't understand it," said Ned. "I cannot think that Mr. Moore could either violate or forget

his promise. I shall go to his house early in the morning and see about it. In the meantime it may be better to say nothing about it to Maud. She has to work, and it would distract her to have this on her mind."

"But, my boy, you must not let it distract you. Even if we lose all we own, so long as we have health we should not feel down-hearted. If Mr. Morton wants the cottage, surely he will pay you all you have spent on it, for the property is worth a great deal more than when we bought it."

"You are right, mother; we should not give up so long as health and love remain. Don't let this worry you. All will come out right in the end."

He kissed her, and they went to their respective rooms, but though very brave before each other, neither got much sleep that night.

Cautioning his mother not to worry Maud with their troubles till it became unavoidable, Ned started off, after an early breakfast, to find Edgar Moore.

It was half-past seven when he reached that young gentleman's home on the most fashionable part of Fifth Avenue, but the grand street was so deserted, and the houses looked so closed up and reserved and sleepy, that he decided to walk up and down for a half hour before ringing the bell.

When at length he found himself in the open door asking a servant if he could see Mr. Moore, there was that in the girl's manner and in the atmosphere of the place that chilled him.

The servant led him into a reception room, took his name and disappeared noiselessly.

In a few minutes a stately old gentleman, with an expression of great anxiety on his face, came in and said to Ned:

"I am Mr. Moore. Do you wish to see me?"

"I think, sir," replied Ned, "the girl misunderstood me. I wished to see your son;" and then, from the fullness of his anxious heart, he told why he had come.

"I regret to have to tell you," said the old gentleman, with a sigh, "that yesterday morning, while trying to stop a runaway team, my son was thrown to the pavement and so seriously injured that the doctors despair of his life. This must be his excuse for not carrying out his promise."

Ned expressed his profound regret for the accident that had befallen his friend, and then left the house.

He must have thought his own affairs desperate indeed, when, as a last resource, he made up his mind to see Donald Morton.

His old employer's house was not far from Mr. Moore's, and thither he hastened.

The old housekeeper, Mrs. Belton, answered the bell.

Ned had often seen her before, and she had always treated him with the greatest respect, but now she not only did not reach out her hand, but she acted as if she had never seen the young man before and was quite willing never to see him again.

“You want to see Mr. Morton, eh? Well, I’ll see if he wants to see you.”

This was Mrs. Belton’s reply to Ned’s request, as she closed the door, leaving him standing on the outside.

In a few minutes Mrs. Belton came back, looking even more stern than before.

“Mr. Morton is busy and asks to be excused,” she said.

“I shall only detain him a moment, Mrs. Belton,” urged Ned.

“It’s no use trying; he won’t see you—of that I am convinced,” said the old lady, a sympathy coming into her not unkindly eyes, as she saw the look of pain on Ned’s face.

Without another word Ned turned away.

The fates were against him.

He saw that the beautiful little home, where he had enjoyed so much quiet happiness, must go.

He deplored this serious blow, not at all on his own account, but because of his mother and Maud.

How could he know that the gentle girl, whom he had saved from death, or even a worse fate, was the direct cause of all the misfortunes now falling on his head?

But had he known the whole truth, it would only have increased his devotion, if that were possible.

He went back to the cottage, to find his mother in tears and the officers of the law in charge.

Useless here to detail the method of procedure; suffice it to say that within four days Ned Rand had to find another and a humbler home for his mother and adopted sister.

CHAPTER XV.

COOTS BECOMES DEFIANT, AND—

THE feeling of selfish love which at one time Donald Morton entertained for the beautiful designer at his factory gave place first to dread and then to hate, as accumulating evidence convinced him that she was the daughter of his own brother, whose trust he had violated, and the child of the woman for whose sad death he was directly responsible.

He cursed himself for having trusted Coots at first, and still more deeply he cursed himself for having made a confidant of such a man as Homer Chiswick.

Yet he felt that he must have some one to help him, for he began to doubt his own judgment; and he lacked the nerve to carry out the monstrous designs which he was so skillful in plotting.

He had come to have a horror of Coots and Chiswick, for he well knew that, sooner or later, one or the other, or both, would appear to plague him, and he might be powerless to oppose.

The more he thought about it, the more he became convinced that his only safety lay in getting Maud out of the way.

With her dead, he could set Coots, Chiswick and every other foe at defiance.

But in the present, as in the past, he knew that he could not act alone.

It was dangerous to hire the co-operation of such a man as he now sorely needed, and yet it would be more dangerous to go on single-handed.

Strange, but at this time he had a greater dread of Ned Rand than of any one else, and hence his efforts to impoverish the young mechanic, and to blast, by monstrous insinuations, his fair name.

He felt that if by any chance Ned could get at the truth as to Maud's ancestry, he would become a Hercules in his efforts to redress her wrongs.

In his desperation Donald Morton sent for a creature, a lawyer named Peter Gurly, to meet him at the house.

Peter Gurly was a little, yellow-faced man of fifty-five or sixty, with a big beard, a bald head, and a fox-like expression of face.

He was the man who had defended successfully some of the very worst criminals in New York. He had no standing at the bar, for it was generally believed that, if he did not actually participate in the crimes of his clients, he always made out to get the lion's share of their ill-gotten gains.

Peter Gurly came, and though we cannot say at this time what took place between him and Morton at their first interview, the fact that the former had been employed in Edgar Moore's place in the matter of the mortgage showed that they had come to some sort of an understanding.

For nearly a month after the so-called burglary, Coots did not go near the factory, nor did he give Morton any evidence of his whereabouts.

Again the rich man began to feel a sense of security, for the hope rose up in his heart that Coots and Chiswick had been desperately wounded and had crawled away to die.

He was beginning to draw comfort from this belief, when one night, just as he was about to go to bed, Mrs. Belton came into the library, and said, after an apologetic cough:

“Thatsame man’s at the door, Mr. Morton, and he says he must see you.”

“What man?” demanded Morton, dropping the book he was trying to read, and looking at his house-keeper with an expression of alarm, for of late he had been in that nervous state which is best described by the phrase, “feeling as if something awful’s going to happen.”

“His name is Mr. Coots, sir, and he says you’ll be sure to see him, for he is an old friend, and has something of importance to say to you,” said Mrs. Belton, her shrewd eyes reading the mingled expression of hate and anger in her employer’s face.

“As the fellow seems determined, you might as well show him in, and then bring in a bottle of brandy. This Coots was at one time a good enough fellow, but he has become the slave of drink, and the sooner it kills him, the better for himself and those he plagues with his passion.”

As Donald Morton said this, he tried to look very virtuous; and as Mrs. Belton went out to admit Coots, she tried to look as if she believed implicitly every word he told her.

“’Spose you didn’t ever expect to see me agin,” said Coots, slapping his hat on the table and dropping into a chair with an emphasis that showed he did not think the rich man was conferring on him a favor by seeing him at that late hour.

“I haven’t had time to think about you, Coots. Where have you been this long time?”

As Morton asked the question, he rose and closed the library door, and then came back, drew his chair nearer to that of his visitor, and sat down.

“I’ve been nursing a sick friend; but he’s gettin’ round all right agin, so I thought I’d come round an’ draw a little cash. Ain’t been so hard up since I left Australia,” said Coots, speaking in a lower tone, but looking even more defiant than when he came in.

“I am always glad to help you, Coots, for I am not the man to forget an old friend, but I wish you could get some regular work and stick to it.”

“Donald Morton, when fust I met up with you I was rather a decent young man; at least I had done nothing very bad; but you made me an outlaw an’ gave me a horror of steady, reg’lar work,” said Coots.

Looking full into the other’s unsteady eyes, he continued:

“I served my ’prenticeship under you, an’ now that

I'm a master-mechanic in the ways of crime, I expect you to stand by me with the rhino, if the luck goes agin me."

"Haven't I stood by you, Coots?"

"Yes; as the wolf stands by the lamb, as the fox stands by a hen-house, or a thief by a drunken man as has his pockets full of money. Men that hire other men to do a murder ain't never very fond of their tools. Come, Donald Morton, you can lie an' play the fine gent to the world, but it won't go down with me. I have committed crimes and served my time for them, but I am no murderer or robber of my own kin. You can't say the same an' not have me tell you that you lie in your heart, an' in your throat, an' in your tongue. Now, I want money, an' then I'll talk to you some more—"

"Hush, Coots!" whispered Morton, for at that instant Mrs. Belton came in, carrying a tray, on which were a bottle, glasses, and a silver pitcher containing water.

"Anything else, sir?" asked Mrs. Belton, as she backed out of the library.

"Nothing else, thank you. You can go to bed, Mrs. Belton; I will close the front door when the gentleman leaves," said Morton.

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, Mrs. Belton."

The housekeeper withdrew and closed the door after her, while Morton addressed himself to Coots and the contents of the decanter.

"Here, Coots, you will find this brandy excellent; try some."

"I like brandy as well as the next man, but before I touch a drop I want all the ready cash you have about you."

"That is only fifty dollars."

"Give it to me, and I'll call at the factory for a thousand in the morning. You shot a friend of mine, an' you tried to shoot me; but as you didn't kill us, why, I expect you to pay for the fun. How's your own wound?"

"Better," said Morton, as he counted fifty dollars from his pocket-book into Coots's hand.

"Do you want to know who shot you?" asked Coots, with a grin.

"I know now."

"Then why do you spread the report that you suspect Ned Rand? Why do you hunt that young fellow down? Has he ever hurt you?"

"I spread no reports, Coots."

"But you do, an' I know it. An' if you don't change mighty quick, an' let up on Ned Rand, an' do the square thing by the gal you've so wronged, the world will know it if it costs me my life!" cried Coots.

"Let us drink, Coots, and then talk about that. I want to do right." Here Morton examined the brandy bottle, and added: "Why, Mrs. Belton didn't bring the right stuff. Wait a moment."

He left the library, taking the bottle with him.

He went softly up to his own room, slipped a loaded revolver into the pocket of his wrapper, and came back again.

Morton drank a glass, which convinced his visitor that the liquor was not poisoned.

Coots drank again and again—drank till he became drunk and boisterous and abusive.

The watchmen outside heard a noise; then the report of a pistol.

Again a cry for help rang through the house, and again a man lay stretched on the library floor, but this time the bullet had finished its deadly work.

The ex-convict had counted too much on his employer's forbearance, and had paid for his temerity with his worthless life.

CHAPTER XVI.

EXIT COOTS AND ENTER CHISWICK.

“I SHOT him in self-defense.”

These were the words with which Donald Morton saluted the officers who crowded into the library.

Stretched out on the floor lay Coots, with a murderous-looking knife clutched in his powerful right hand, and a round, red spot over his right temple.

The ex-convict was as dead as Hector.

From the Central Police Office, to which the news was speedily flashed, came detectives and a coroner to the scene of the ghastly tragedy.

Donald Morton was put in a nominal arrest.

He said that he had killed this man in self-defense, and his statement was believed.

The older officers looked down at the face of the dead man, and they recognized the thief and ex-convict.

As between the wretched Coots and the wealthy Morton there could be but one opinion, at least in the minds of men who knew nothing of the inner life of either.

Morton's story was that he had known Coots when he was a respectable young man, and that he had been his friend.

In the hope of helping the ex-convict to a better life, he—Morton—had befriended him since his return to New York some six months before.

He had advised with Coots, and given him money, but all to no avail.

This night Coots had come to his house drunk, and drawing a knife, demanded more money. He—Morton—refused, and killed the man, who otherwise would have killed him.

This was the story he told to his servants and to the officers of the law, and they believed it without question.

He expected to be taken to the lock-up, but the chief of police, in view of his great wealth, saved him from a humiliation which he must have endured had he been merely a mechanic.

Officers were placed about the house, and Donald Morton was forbidden to leave; but as he had no inclination to go out, this could hardly be called an imprisonment.

He went to his own room, and lay down with many a groan.

He was not acting.

His doctor came, made an examination, and said that Mr. Morton was suffering from nervous prostration.

Ah, doctors will indeed be skilled when, by feeling the wrist, they can discover the blood of the murderer on the hand; when, by laying the hand on the brow, they can read the thoughts burning within

the brain ; and when, by looking at the tongue, they can see down to the heart and know all its secrets.

The fact that a noted criminal had been killed in the residence of Mr. Donald Morton was known the next morning in every house in New York, and in every house in the great circle of surrounding cities in which a paper was taken.

The attempt to rob Mr. Morton's house and to murder himself was so recent an event that every one recalled it, and every one jumped to the conclusion that the dead ex-convict was in some way connected with the former crime.

"What a monster of infamy that Coots must have been to attempt the murder of the generous man who had so long befriended him, and who had tried so hard to redeem him from his vile life." This was the general, the almost unanimous, opinion of all who discussed "the tragedy," as it was called.

Even Coots's wife was inclined to believe the worst of a man who had been anything but a good husband to her ; but, strangely enough, Coots's children, Polly and Push, thought better of the father—perhaps it was because they knew so little about him ; and they boldly declared, to any who would listen, that Morton murdered him.

The next morning the coroner and a jury which he had summoned appeared in the library of Mr. Morton's house to decide how the man, still stiff and prone on the floor, had come to his death.

Although the doors were guarded to keep out the

mob gathered on the sidewalks, the hall and library were crowded by those who had been admitted.

There were but few witnesses to examine.

There was no one there to speak in behalf of the dead man.

Donald Morton and Mrs. Belton, the only persons who had seen Coots the night before, gave their evidence; and from this evidence the jury decided, without an instant's discussion, that the shot that killed the ex-convict was fired in self-defense.

Again Donald Morton was a free man—free in more senses than one, for a great danger had been taken from his life-path.

The officers of the law were about to remove the body to the station-house, from which point it was to have been carried to the Potter's Field, when a young woman, plainly clad, entered from the hall, followed by a rough-looking young man.

"This man," said Polly Wogley, dropping on one knee and laying her hand on the cold brow, "was my father and the father of this young man—my brother. You call him a criminal, but we know that it was the man who killed him that made him what he was. The future will prove all this. But what we want now is the consent of the law to take him from here and to bury him in our own way."

"That," added Push, with burning eyes and an angry scowl that convinced Morton that a younger and a more desperate Coots survived—"that, an' to say that the end of this isn't nigh in sight yet."

The children were granted permission to bury the body of their father; and, as they had come with an undertaker, the dead Coots was at once taken to the Neptune House.

Congratulations were tendered to Donald Morton by the officers and the newspaper reporters, and by many business men, who had called to express their sympathy.

Gradually the crowd filed out, and Morton was left alone.

The library was closed, and he was sitting in a little reception-room to the left of the hall, weighing the difficulties that yet confronted him, when a man with long hair and a heavy beard, who had concealed himself behind the curtains in the library, came and stood in the doorway and looked in.

“Don’t you know me, Mr. Morton?” asked the man.

“I—I do not!” gasped Morton.

The man came into the room, and as he closed the door behind him he took off his wig and false beard, revealing the thin, olive face and glittering black eyes of Homer Chiswick.

Coots was dead, but here, confronting him, stood a man more to be dreaded than a thousand blunders like Coots.

With a desperate effort Morton made as if he would extend his hand, but it fell like lead by his side. Still he managed to say:

“Why, Chiswick, where have you been?”

“Away; but I did not go quite as far as you de-

sired," replied Chiswick, putting the disguise into his coat pocket, and taking a chair so that he could face the man now actually cowering before him.

"I do not understand you."

"If you understood me, you would have acted differently. You intended to send me to the grave, and for weeks I have stood gasping on its gloomy edge. But I am back, and I am now able to get along without Coots," said Chiswick, with a smile that was positively devilish in its cool malignity and burning scorn.

Without giving the other a chance to make a comment, he continued, in the same freezing tones:

"We are henceforth opposed in a desperate game. We understand each other. Your hand is known to me; if you knew my hand, you would give up the struggle at once. Oh! you need not affect anger, for you do not feel it; your cowardly heart is throbbing at this moment as if you were a hunted hare, with no cover in sight, and the hounds close behind you. You are armed. I see your fingers clutching the hilt of that pistol in your wrapper pocket, but so soon after last night's murder you have not the nerve to commit another—no, not though you were sure that it would save you from the doom which you so richly merit."

"My God, man!" broke in Donald Morton, "what do you want?"

"I am here to tell you what I want, and to demand—do you hear?—to demand that you obey me."

“Go on, sir,” stammered Morton.

“You must transfer to me the full value of the property of which you have so long defrauded your niece, and then you must use all your influence to make her my wife. Do this, and I shall destroy the damning evidence I hold against you. Refuse to do it, and I shall show you to the world as the foremost criminal monster in all its records,” said Chiswick, with an awful oath.

Often during his long career of infamy, Donald Morton asked himself what he would do in case he was discovered.

He was constantly imagining dangers and planning to guard against them, but he had never conceived himself in such a position as this.

Where he could not act the lion, he was quite ready to play the fox; and it needed no deliberation to convince him that the latter was now the proper role.

“Mr. Chiswick,” he began, with well-assumed surprise, “you amaze me. I have given you no reason for this cruel treatment. You know that I have been your friend, and while you seem to think that I have tried to injure you, I am ready to swear to my entire innocence.”

“Of course you are ready to swear,” sneered Chiswick.

“I am in no mood to be insulted, Chiswick, and if your mind was not disturbed, you would not attempt it. I solemnly declare that I know not why you left me or where you went to; and when asked about it,

I said that you had gone away to enjoy a well-earned vacation. Let me say here that I did not mean to harm you that night, though I was convinced that you were working against me with Coots. Now, I propose that you come back and resume your old position. I am ready to pay you any salary you may demand, and if you can win the young lady whom you call my niece, I shall endow her with a fortune ample for you and her. We can work together, and as I am single and childless, when I come to die, my property will be yours."

This was said with such an assumption of candor that for the moment the younger man was ready to yield; but he withdrew his hand and said:

"How can I trust a man who has succeeded only by invoking the aid of every crime forbidden in the decalogue?"

"Chiswick, if you wish to help yourself, you must begin by treating me with respect," said Morton, with affected dignity.

"With respect?" sneered Chiswick.

"That is what I said."

"But I am not accustomed to act contrary to my feelings."

"That is the only way you do act." Morton's courage was coming as he saw the other wavering, and he continued: "If all you claim to know against me were true, and you were to declare it to the world, and you were so far believed that I was hanged, how would that benefit your fortunes?"

"It might not benefit my fortunes, but to men of my temperament there is something dearer than dollars," said Chiswick.

"And what is that, pray?"

"Revenge!"

"Nonsense! I thought you had more sense, and I am sure that you are making another attempt to do what you failed in before."

"And in what did I fail, Mr. Morton?"

"You failed to deceive me."

"To deceive you! Why, your life has been one constant role of deception, till at last it has come to this, that you deceive yourself more than any one else could do—"

"Stop, Chiswick. Let me ask you a question."

"Go on."

"I have had a detective following you for months. I know all about your conduct for that time, and I have in my hands evidence that would send you to the penitentiary at once. Now, will you join me and accept my offer, or will you declare war against me? Let me remind you I am a hard man to fight."

"But how can I trust you after what has passed?"

"As to that," said Morton, beginning to feel that he was again master of the situation, "in view of what has passed you can trust me quite as well as I can you; but for myself I am willing to forget the past and try it again."

CHAPTER XVII.

DARK DAYS FOR NED RAND.

“Do not despair, dear brother,” said Maud, coming behind Ned’s chair and laying her hands on his shoulders. “Let the cottage go. It was only a happy home because we were happy in it. I feel that we could never be happy here again. Near the school where I teach there are some charming little flats to let. I examined them to-day, and as the rent is only fifteen dollars a month, I told the agent that we would take the third-story front. It has three bedrooms, a bathroom, a gem of a kitchen, and a cozy little apartment that will do for dining-room and parlor. Why, bless you, Ned, we’ll soon forget our troubles there. Come, cheer up!”

She bent over and kissed him, and that kiss, like the touch of the prophet’s wand on the parched rock, brought the waters of comfort to his sight and filled his heart with hope.

“I am a fool to give up,” he said, catching the little hands that still rested on his shoulders. “It is not the loss of the cottage from which we must move to-day that troubles me; it is the loss of reputation—the fact that men believe evil of me.”

“But,” she urged, “the loss of reputation is noth-

ing to the loss of character. Reputation is the world's opinion; character is what we actually are. The noblest men that ever lived have had in their day the worst reputations, but they nobly lived them down. The worst men, as you and I know, have often excellent reputations; but time discovers them for what they are. Think, dear Ned, is there any living man with whom you would be willing to change places?"

"None, Maud," he replied. And he pressed the little hands as the thought filled his soul that to be any other man would be not to know her.

"You have health and mother and—me?"

"Yes! yes! thank God!" he exclaimed, devoutly.

Ah, Ned Rand, black indeed would be the cloud that her presence could not dispel, and jarring would be the discords of your life which her words could not make harmonious and her dear voice musical.

What was the loss of everything, so that she remained? What man living was so rich as he in the possession of this love?

He was in no mood to reason that it was a sister's love, and that to her, at least, the impossible gulf of kinship yawned between them.

To analyze the cause of our joy is often to destroy it.

He rose, caught her to his breast, and kissed her as he had never done before, saying, in a gentle, mellow tone, that must have found an instinctive echo in her woman's heart:

"My darling, your love shames me back to man-

hood and to a fuller appreciation of the blessings that are left."

Mrs. Rand, when left a widow with her boy, had developed a character for industry, hopefulness and self-reliance that now displayed itself with all the old-time vigor and nobility.

Her son's reverses acted on her like a bugle blast on a retired charger, filling her with the strength and resolve of other days.

It must not be imagined that Ned's was in any sense a weak or a dependent nature. Above everything else, he was simple, brave and manly; but he was dazed for a while by the suddenness of the blow that had fallen on him, but, above all, by the vague yet horrible charges against his good name—charges that he was as powerless to refute as he would have been to rid himself of his shadow.

The cottage had passed into the hands of a stranger, and this was the last day for them to remain in occupation. As it was a Saturday, Maud had no school, and so she could help with the moving.

It was decided to take the flat; and now that there was something to do, Ned set to work with that cheerfulness and energy that had always distinguished him.

Before night they were established in their new home, and it was near Sunday morning before the three stopped putting down carpets and hanging up pictures, and all declared that the latter would have made a barn look like home.

Of all the money Ned put into the cottage, he got back not one cent. The place was sold by the sheriff, and the lawyer, Peter Gurly, bid it in for the amount of Morton's mortgage and the expenses of getting possession.

Maud showed, with a pencil and paper to prove her statement, that her salary of fifty dollars a month would be sufficient to pay the rent and keep them in comparative comfort, no matter how long Ned was out of a place.

But it was not in Ned's nature to remain satisfied with this arrangement. To a man accustomed to work, enforced idleness is a constant torture. Particularly is this the case when the pressing need for wages is felt.

He saw that it would be folly to continue the search for employment in the wall-paper factories, where his skill and experience would be of the most value.

He was well educated, having gained his knowledge in the hard but thorough school of self-training.

He was a natural mechanic, and he had that adaptability peculiar to the thorough American, who soon becomes skilled in whatever he undertakes.

He inserted an advertisement in the papers, but without success, for it was a period of commercial depression; and he studiously read the columns of "wants" every morning, in the hope of finding a place that he could fill.

Yet long weeks of agony passed, and Ned wore out his last pair of shoes in the vain effort to find work.

It was while looking over the "want" columns one morning that his eyes fell on the account of the killing of Coots.

Ned was sorry and surprised; for, while he did not believe Coots to be a good man, he had a feeling bordering on respect for Mrs. Wogley and her daughter, whose strange story had been told him by the latter.

As he was walking the streets about noon that day, with no objective point in view, he was startled by hearing a woman call his name, and, looking up, he found himself face to face with Polly.

He took her extended hand and told her how sorry he was for the trouble that had come to her; and recalling her kindness when Maud was rescued from the river, he asked if there was anything he could do for her.

"Only to come to the funeral to-morrow," said Polly. Then, after a pause, she took a step nearer and whispered: "Ned Rand, your old boss is a murderer!"

"Mr. Morton?"

"Yes; Mr. Donald Morton. He is a murderer; and some day the whole truth will come out. I don't know all, but I know a great deal, and when I learn more he'll find it out."

"I am afraid Mr. Morton is a bad man," said Ned,

cautiously, "but I hope he's not so bad as you think."

"He's worse than I dare think," said Polly, quickly. "My father was not what you nor me would call a good man, but it was Morton that led him first astray, and my mother knows it. And, more than that, my mother knows where Morton's wife is living to-day, and she's 'most sure that she's found out his son."

"His son, Polly!" exclaimed Ned.

"Yes; he has a wife and a son; but the world thinks him a single man, just as the world thinks him good. Wouldn't it be a God's justice," she continued, in a chilling whisper, "if the son that he cast off was to come back and blast his life, as the lightning darts from heaven upon the man that defies it?"

Without waiting for Ned's reply, Polly turned and hurried away, leaving him chilled and confused.

The next day Ned went to the Neptune House to show by his presence at the funeral his respect for Polly and her mother.

Mrs. Wogley, beyond a sterner expression on her strong face, gave no sign of grief for the loss—if loss it might be called—of the husband who had cursed her life, and who would have ruined it but for her own strength of character.

The flag over the floating house was at half mast, and a crowd of villainous-looking men gathered in the main room where the coffin rested. These were the dead man's associates in crime.

Among the crowd there was a number of detectives, and Chiswick was also there, disguised as when he startled Donald Morton the day before.

Peter Gurly, the thieves' lawyer, was also present, and he showed a great desire to be friendly with Ned, though he received no encouragement.

Push Wogley's face was the only one that showed no sorrow; it would be a mistake to say that it did not show feeling.

Again and again he came over to look at the dead man, and to turn away with such a glitter in his eyes and such a scowl on his low, bulging brows as could not pass unnoticed.

There were no religious services. Not a syllable of regret was spoken when the coffin was carried out by four thieves to the waiting hearse.

Polly wanted Ned to ride in one of the carriages to the cemetery; but he excused himself, saying that he had a fever and a headache.

He told the truth. He went home that evening reeling like a drunken man.

The moment his mother and Maud saw him they knew he was ill, and despite his protests they prevailed on him to lie down.

He undressed and went to bed, little thinking that, like a Roman gladiator, he was entering the arena to battle with death.

But even had he known that it was to be a struggle with death, he would not have held back from fear, particularly if he could have had some assur-

ance that his trials might result to the advantage of those he loved.

He assured Maud and his mother that his only trouble was a slight cold.

“A slight cold, dear Ned,” sighed Maud, as, after helping him off with his torn, worn shoes, she held them up to the light. “One less strong would have his death of cold, if forced to wear these.”

That night she took Ned’s shoes to her own room and she looked at them again till the tears she could not repress hid them from her eyes.

“Oh, Ned,” she sobbed, “only to think that you, so good, so brave and so generous, should be forced to this! In my first memory of you, you took the coat from your own shoulders to shield me—a weak, helpless, motherless child—from the storm. Oh, what can I do to help you, to show you my love in this, the hour of your great trials?”

Not knowing what answer to give to this, she fell upon her knees and asked the Father of all to direct her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAUD'S TEMPTATION.

BEFORE morning Ned Rand had developed a severe case of brain fever, and was raving like a maniac.

He had caught a heavy cold, and this, with his great mental anxiety and highly sensitive nature, had brought him low, as such troubles might not have brought a weaker or less honorable person.

Mrs. Rand and Maud sat up with him all night, and early the following morning a doctor was called in.

The doctor examined the patient, and said, as he prepared to write a prescription :

"Mrs. Rand, your son should be sent to a hospital."

"Never!" replied Mrs. Rand, who had the general prejudice against such institutions. "I can nurse him as no one else can."

"Very well; but as this fever develops he will need such restraint as only trained male nurses can give. It will be impossible for you to manage him. He may destroy everything when the impulse is on him, for he is a powerful man," said Dr. Kenworthy.

"Ah!" she replied, "my boy loves his sister and

me too well to think harm to us, much less to do it."

"If he were in his senses there would be no danger; but as you have called me in this case you must do as I say, or let me withdraw," said the doctor, with great decision.

Mrs. Rand agreed at length to do just as the doctor ordered, only that she would not let Ned be sent to the hospital; which implied a distinction, and a decided difference.

"I know a bright, intelligent young man, who is now disengaged, and who, some years ago, graduated as a doctor, but he never practiced. I am sure he will come here for a week or two, and I am equally sure that his price will be very reasonable," said the doctor.

Although Mrs. Rand and Maud had but little money at their command, yet this was no time to consider expense, so they told the doctor to send the nurse.

The doctor left, after telling Mrs. Rand how to give the medicine for which Maud had gone out to the nearest drug store.

It was nearly an hour before she returned, and then, to her great surprise, she found Homer Chiswick installed as Ned's nurse.

"I am glad to be here," he said, "for I think you will find me of more use than an ordinary nurse. Dr. Kenworthy is an old friend. It was he who got me employment with that wretch, Donald Morton.

For the past week my headquarters have been at the doctor's house, and I must thank him for sending me to care for your noble brother."

Chiswick spoke in the low, gentle voice befitting one who fully realized the importance of his position.

Maud, after the first glance, did not dare to look at him.

She should and did feel grateful to him for having, as she believed, saved her life.

In his vicinity, she had been drawn irresistibly toward this man. She felt the influence he exercised over her, and every time she was freed from his presence she made up her mind to avoid him in the future, if that were possible.

But here he was, ready to take up his abode in the little flat. She shuddered at the thought, and it was only when she reasoned that Chiswick's presence might be essential to her brother's life that she became reconciled.

With the light step, quick eye and ready hand of one accustomed to such work, Chiswick made the invalid comfortable in bed, administered the medicine which Maud brought, and then said to Mrs. Rand:

"Darkness and quiet are very necessary to the patient."

"And you think he will get well?" asked the anxious mother, who from the first had conceived an exalted idea of this young man's abilities, which she believed to be proportioned to his satanic beauty.

“Mr. Rand is a very strong man,” said Chiswick. “He has youth, an unimpaired constitution, and good care on his side. He must recover, but it will be some days before the disease develops so as to reach a crisis.”

It was still early in the forenoon, and being assured that her presence was not essential to Ned’s comfort, Maud hurried off to attend to her duties at Professor Colville’s Institute.

She now saw that more than ever she must work, for her wages as a teacher was all that stood between her loved ones and actual poverty.

Winter was upon them, and she had planned to get herself and her mother stout shoes and warmer dresses, but in the face of greater wants these necessities took on the appearance of luxuries that must be dispensed with.

All day she worked with her pupils like one in a dream. Every unusual sound struck her ears like Ned’s voice summoning her to his side.

The minutes seemed hours, so great was her anxiety to go to him, and yet in thinking of Ned she saw Chiswick’s black eyes and luminous olive face rising up between her and the gentle-hearted man, the woof of whose life was so strongly inwoven with the warp of her own.

She explained to the kind-hearted professor the reason for her nervousness and abstracted manner during the day; and he told her that if her brother required her presence, she was at liberty to stay

away till he got better, without having any abatement made in her salary.

On reaching home at four o'clock that afternoon, Maud found Ned unconscious. His face was flushed and he muttered incoherently, but her name was ever on his lips.

Chiswick was all courtesy and deference; and his professions of devotion to the sick man tended to soothe the feelings of mingled dread and fascination with which Maud regarded him.

Mrs. Rand came into the sick room where Maud, who had not yet removed her ulster, sat holding Ned's hand, and whispered:

"There is a messenger from Mr. Moore's to see you."

Maud went out to the dining-room and found a young man with a note addressed to her.

It read:

"Miss Rand will no doubt regret to hear that my son is still very low and weak. He speaks of her constantly, and she will confer a great favor on him and me by coming here with the bearer.

MRS. E. L. MOORE."

"The carriage is ready at the door," said the messenger, waving his hand in the direction of the street.

Maud gave the note to Mrs. Rand, and asked:

"What shall I do?"

"It is your duty to go," was the reply. Then Mrs. Rand added: "May Heaven give strength to the mothers who are watching by the sick beds of their children this day."

Without any change in her dress, or even a glance

into the mirror, without which but few young ladies venture to leave the house, Maud told the messenger she was ready, and followed him down to the carriage.

It was the first time she had ever ridden in such a splendid affair, yet she was as wanting in self-consciousness as if she were riding in a street car.

She had never met Edgar Moore's parents, nor did she give them a thought till she stood face to face with the aristocratic-looking old couple in the stately drawing-room.

"I thank you for coming," said Mrs. Moore, as she kissed Maud. "Our poor boy has wanted you, and we are to blame for not having sent for you before."

"I regret your son's suffering for his sake and your own," said Maud, her beautiful face in harmony with her words; "yet I fear it is but little that I can do to relieve him."

"Let us see about that, my dear child," said Mrs. Moore, who, from Maud's first entrance, appeared to be fascinated by her appearance and manners.

She was conducted up the broad stairs to Edgar's room. What a contrast it was to the little chamber in which Ned lay, and what a contrast Edgar's worn face and hollow eyes to Ned's so flushed and wild!

"Oh, Maud, thank God you are here at last! I—I cannot raise my arms," cried Edgar, looking down at his wasted, paralyzed hands.

"Then I shall raise them for you." As Maud spoke

she took the cold hands in hers, and stooping, she kissed the pale forehead.

After placing a chair near the head of the bed, Mrs. Moore stole softly out of the room, closing the door behind her.

Edgar was so full of his subject that he did not even inquire for Ned or Mrs. Rand. It may be that he thought no illness could come to them.

He told Maud that he feared he could not live, or that, if he lived, he would be a cripple all his life.

"I would rather die than be a care to others," he said. "But I wanted to tell you that I have won my parents to my side, and when they know you they will love you. You are poor, but as their daughter you will be rich. It is no selfish whim that moves me now, my darling. I am thinking only of your welfare. Should I die, as I fear I must, I want to hold your hand, the hand of my wife, before I go down into the valley of the shadow."

Maud's nature was far too frank and open for her to pretend that she did not understand Edgar Moore.

After a pause, during which his sad, eager eyes were fastened on hers, long-lashed and drooping, she said:

"In times of trial, a wife's place is by her husband's side."

"Surely it is," he replied.

"And she should give to him no divided duty."

"I do not fear your doing so, Maud, but as to your loving and caring for Ned and your mother, no attention that you can give them will make me jealous."

"Then you have not heard from Ned?"

"Only that he moved. And when I get a little stronger, I shall try to remedy the unconscious injury I have done him. Will you please to tell him so?"

"If I were to tell him now," she answered, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "he would not understand me."

"Not understand you, Maud?"

"No;" with a sad shake of the head.

"But why not?"

"You have cares enough of your own without being annoyed by ours," she said.

"But something has happened to your brother?"

"Yes; his physical and mental sufferings have brought on a brain fever, and now, unconscious of his surroundings, he lies near the door of death."

"You startle me!"

Edgar's expression showed that he did not exaggerate.

He tried to raise his hands to his white face, and realizing his inability, he uttered a groan that seemed to come from his heart.

"I could die," he said, huskily, "if, in dying, I could bring happiness to you and yours, Maud; but to think that I am, indirectly, the cause of Ned's sufferings, pains me more than the injury that has made me, oh, so weak and helpless."

"Still, still," she cried, again taking his hands, "you are not to blame."

CHAPTER XIX.

IN SORE STRAITS.

WHEN Maud left Mr. Moore's house that evening, she had to promise that she would come back the next forenoon and see Edgar.

"For," said the distracted mother, "your coming has done my boy much good; and there is nothing that gives him happiness that can be denied."

Poor girl! she was now in sore straits herself, and much in need of a helping hand.

Under other circumstances she would have gone at once to Ned or his mother, certain that either or both would give her the love and sympathy and good counsel of which she stood so sorely in need.

But Ned—brave, generous Ned—was himself worse than helpless, for his reason had drifted away from its strong moorings, his body was fevered, and his soul tempest-tossed.

As for Mrs. Rand, Maud reasoned that she had already more anxiety than she could well bear, for her heart was wrapped up in her noble boy; and so she decided not to tell her about Edgar Moore's offer—at least for the present.

It was now clear to her that she could not attend to her duties as drawing teacher and at the same

time visit Edgar Moore and assist Mrs. Rand in nursing Ned and caring for the little home.

"I will try it for one week," reasoned Maud, "and if by the end of that time I cannot return to Professor Colville's, I shall resign, so that he can get some one else to fill my place."

Great as were the trials the brave girl had now to encounter, she felt that she could combat or endure them with a greater fortitude if she were only freed from the overpowering presence of Homer Chiswick.

Go where she would, she heard his low, bell-like voice ringing in her ears, and the wonderful black eyes and the olive face, with its swarthy, phosphorescent glow, were ever before her.

Waking or sleeping, it was always the same.

When away from him she wanted to fly, so that she might never see him again; but each time she saw him and heard him she felt that her power to resist the mesmeric spell he had thrown about her grew weaker and weaker.

The feeling to which she was yielding no more resembled love than lightning resembles the steady glow of spring sunshine, or the child's obedience to the gentle wish of the mother resembles the galley slave's compliance with the command of the official who guards him and bars his liberty.

Chiswick, by neither word, act nor expression, gave the slightest indication of the influence he had over Maud, and of which he must have been aware from the first.

He became more reserved, more absorbed in the business of caring for the sick man.

Yet nothing escaped him. His abstraction was either assumed or it came to him when he was mapping out and perfecting the intricate and unscrupulous plans that were to lead to the overthrow of Donald Morton and his own elevation, as the husband of the beautiful Maud.

He worked from the strong vantage ground of knowing more about her than she knew about herself.

He hailed Ned's sickness as the best possible thing that could have happened for himself.

And when in his ravings—ravings which Maud was not permitted to hear—Ned told of his love for the girl to whom he had devoted all that was best in his own noble life, Chiswick began to feel that it would be still better for his own plans if the fever were permitted to burn the cords that held the patient to earth.

It has been shown already that Chiswick had no conception of what the world calls "conscience."

Of right and wrong his training had given him a good knowledge, but the doing of either had equal merit in his eyes, and he was quite ready to do either if it would forward his own ends without danger to his life or his liberty.

He was a wonderful exemplification of a brilliant intellect in a beautiful form, but with the soul absent.

At heart he was a coward, and he had an animal's instinctive dread of pain and death; and yet the

animal in his composition was wholly subordinated to his phenomenal mental qualities and his complete mastery of his emotions. It may be that the soulless are incapable of emotion.

Two beings more completely opposite than this man and Maud Rand it would be impossible to conceive.

Her fair face, madonna-like, with its aureole of golden hair, and the soulful eyes, in which the gray twilight and noon-deep blue were blended, was no more distinct from his satanic beauty than was the profound humanity of her heart and mind from the somber unearthliness of his.

But whether beside the bed of suffering Edgar Moore, or listening to, without daring to look at, Homer Chiswick, the object of all Maud's acts, the central thought, about which every other thought revolved as the planets revolve about the sun, was the recovery of her adopted brother.

Every day for a week she went to Mr. Moore's, spending as many or more hours there than she would have done at school, and then going home to help her mother.

Seeing that another week of the same painful routine opened up before her, she went to the Institute and insisted on resigning a place the duties of which it was impossible to fill.

Professor Colville urged her to take her wages for the past week, but, much as she wanted the money, she refused, saying:

"If I could continue the work next week I would accept wages for the last, but under the circumstances I do not feel it would be right."

And so she left without the money, the professor telling her that her place would be held for her till she could come back.

By this time her funds had become very low; and Maud, anxious to save her mother, took her guitar and some articles of jewelry, that Ned had given her, to the nearest pawn shop; and on these things she raised a few dollars.

The pawnbroker's eyes caught the gleam of gold at her throat, and when she objected to the small amount he gave her, he asked:

"What is that about your neck?"

On the impulse she took off the chain, with the locket, shaped like a heart of gold.

"I will let you have fifteen dollars for that," said the man, examining the links of the curious chain, and opening the lids of the locket.

"I want more money," she said, as she refastened the chain about her neck, "and it may be that I must have it to save his life, but till then I shall keep what has never been off my neck for an hour since my earliest recollection."

"Father sick?" asked the man.

"No, sir,"

"Husband?"

"No—my brother."

"Ah, that's bad," said the pawnbroker, as Maud

turned to leave; "but if you want fifteen for that chain at any time, come round and I'll try and raise it for you."

On her way home she met Polly Wogley and Push, the latter wearing his habitual scowl, though it seemed to lighten in Maud's presence.

"I heard of your brother's sickness," Polly began, "and though neither him nor no one else knows how I feel an' have long felt to him, I couldn't rest till I saw him."

"Have you been to the house?" asked Maud.

"Yes; just come from there; an' I'm now out huntin' you. You see I couldn't talk to your brother, coz his mind is off; nor to your mother, for that yellow devil, Chiswick, was around; but here's the business. A long time ago, when mother was sick and we was hard up, I asked your brother to help us, an' he gave me fifty dollars. I guess he forgot all about it, but I haven't. Now, there's nothin' so handy in times of sickness as a little ready money; so, as I had the cash on hand, I thought I'd come down an' fork it over. There it is—fifty without interest. Don't count it on the street; an' if me or Push can help, let us know. I'll be down again in a day or two. Keep your upper lip starched."

As Polly said this she kissed Maud's hand, and turning, hurried away with her brother.

Maud believed the girl; the act of helping those in distress and then saying nothing to a soul about it was so like brave Ned.

The money was a godsend. But it is just to the record to state right here that Ned, though he certainly would have helped Polly had she asked it, never loaned her a cent in his life, for the Neptune House and the boats brought in more money than the owners needed for their simple wants.

Polly knew that Ned had lost the cottage for the want of money, and she reasoned that in his sickness his mother would be hard pressed. The fifty dollars was the half of a sum she had saved from her own earnings, and she invented the fiction of a loan from Ned, so that Maud could have no hesitation in taking it.

Maud grasped the money with the clutch of a miser.

To her it seemed as Heaven-sent, as surely it was.

She felt that Ned had cast this morsel of bread on the waters of Benevolence, and that Gratitude had brought it back after many days.

Before this she had been somewhat indifferent to the power of money; it had been simply a means to an end—a medium between labor and its necessities. But now she felt, for the moment, that it had some intrinsic merit—some magic power to help Ned and to lighten the burden of care that pressed so heavily on her dear mother's heart.

She could not stop on the way to purchase, as had been her habit, the articles necessary for their little household, so eager was she to tell Mrs. Rand of their good fortune.

“Ned was always doing good,” said Mrs. Rand, when Maud had counted the money into her palm ; “but his left hand never knew what his right hand did in that way. But the curious part about this is that when one does a favor to the needy, they forget it when the need is over, or else they become the enemies of those who helped them. Polly Wogley is an exception to the rule. She has an honest heart, and may Heaven guard her ever from want.”

And we echo the good woman's prayer, for Polly's act had the double merit of a lofty motive and a delicate method.

A noble act must be done in a noble way.

CHAPTER XX.

DONALD MORTON AND PETER GURLY.

IT is an awful thing to take the life of another, even in self-defense; still, the very best people believed, and so expressed themselves, that Donald Morton had done the law-abiding world a good service in ridding it of the wretched Coots.

The coroner's jury had declared him guiltless; and so long as the law upheld him, Donald Morton was comfortable, if not actually happy in his security.

As counsel in the management of his vast and complicated business, Morton retained some of the foremost lawyers in New York; but these learned men were powerless to help him in the vast and complicated villainies whereby he had come into possession and still retained the greater part of his wealth.

He never had been able to work without tools; and now, when a long immunity from danger had weakened his confidence in himself, tools became more necessary than ever.

Peter Gurly proved every day that he was the very man of whom Morton stood so much in need.

He was quiet, sly and low-voiced; and to Morton a crime seemed always less criminal when it was

discussed in a whisper in a dimly-lit room, such as Gurly preferred.

The library had been Morton's favorite apartment, but he went there no more. Even in broad daylight he passed the place in a hurry without daring to look in.

He ordered Mrs. Belton to keep the library doors and windows open by day, and all the gas jets in the room lit at night, as if light and air in that place could have any effect in driving the shadows from his own black heart, or expelling from his brain the haunting memory of a cowardly murder.

Morton was forced, by the very necessities of the case, to take Peter Gurly into his confidence. It was easier to discuss crime with the thieves' lawyer than with any other man in the world.

Peter Gurly looked at crime from a professional standpoint.

It was the source of his income, and so he could not be expected to think it so bad a thing as did the men who legislated against it.

He understood the needs of Donald Morton's case from first to last, and, as it promised a greater reward than anything he had yet undertaken, he prudently gave it his best thought, and did not permit it to suffer for the want of time.

"The fates favor us," said Peter Gurly, as he and Morton sat one night in the reception room with the light burning low.

"How is that?" asked Morton.

"I saw Dr. Kenworthy this evening, and he says he does not think young Rand can live."

"The worse for him and the better for us," said Morton.

"But," continued Gurly, "there's Chiswick installed at the flat as a nurse. It's the most extraordinary thing how that came about. If we had enemies deliberately working to thwart us, they couldn't have hit on a better move than that. Ah, Chiswick is a keen fellow, if ever there was one. By the bye, Mr. Morton, what do you know about his antecedents?"

"Chiswick's?"

"Yes."

"Nothing."

"Don't know where he hails from?"

"No."

"How did you come to employ him?"

"Through Dr. Kenworthy."

"How did Kenworthy come to know him?"

"Knew his mother, I believe," grunted Morton.

"Where is his mother?"

"Don't know."

"Ever see her, Mr. Morton?"

"Never. Why do you ask?"

"Only that I may learn enough about Chiswick to be able to handle him. If you think it would be prudent, I can have it fixed so as to send him to the penitentiary for years; and if we do that, I can secure any papers he may have, for he will be sure either to employ me or some of the legal friends who

are in with me. Oh, I can have him sent up for ten or fifteen years whenever you say the word."

Peter Gurly spoke like a man discussing a business scheme of the most reputable character.

"How could you do that?" asked Morton.

"I'll show you."

Peter Gurly drew nearer, and with the gracious manner which he always assumed when questioning a witness to whom he was well disposed, he continued:

"Homer Chiswick was, for a time, your secretary, I believe."

"He was."

"You trusted him?"

"I did."

"With money and papers?"

"Yes."

"He could open your safe?"

"Yes."

"Is he now in your employ?"

"No."

"Why did he leave?"

Peter Gurly bent forward, and as Morton showed no disposition to answer, he repeated:

"Why did he leave?"

"Oh, because we couldn't agree."

"No, Mr. Morton; there you are wrong," said Gurly, with the gentle manner of a teacher prompting a very apt scholar. "You discharged Chiswick because he had become the associate of Coots and

other disreputable characters; and because you suspected him of being one of the men who tried to rob your house. Your own detective saw him with Coots near this place, not twenty minutes before you discovered the two men trying to break into your safe. Well, since getting rid of this young man because of his bad associations, you have discovered that a lot of valuable papers, family jewelry, and so forth and so forth, are missing from your safe. You suspect Chiswick; you consult me as a lawyer who knows the way of such people. I have Chiswick arrested; and a search warrant discovers the missing articles in his trunk. Do you understand?"

"I understand; but can that be done?" replied Morton, his admiration for the other's tactical ability rising every moment.

"You let me have the things you want to have stolen," said Gurly, "and I'll see that they are found in the proper place. Why, jobs like that are set up every day. But why should I try to explain to you, when your success proves that you have a genius for such work."

Morton bit his lip, for though he was eaten up with vanity, like all selfish natures, yet this was a kind of compliment in which he could find no delight.

Without attempting to exonerate himself from the infamous charge made so lightly by the lawyer, Morton coughed and said:

"I shall leave the whole matter in your hands. I am ready to do whatever you say; provided, always,

that I can remain in a position that does not endanger my good name and business standing."

"Ah, just so," said Gurly, smacking his thin lips as if he had been given a bit of something sweet and rich to taste.

"And now let us suppose Rand dead and Chiswick disposed of, there will still remain the girl—"

"That need not trouble you," said Gurly. He was about to add, "In order to have her out of the way, I'll marry her myself," but he thought better of it.

"The girl is a fraud. She has no claim on me ; is no relation of mine, yet she is amiable, weak, and pliable; and being very pretty, she is all the more dangerous," said Morton.

"If it can be shown that she is the companion of the vile, it will naturally be inferred that she is vicious. But as she has given no sign that she knows anything of the claims Coots set up for her, let us do nothing for the present, except to be prepared to prove to the world that she is a disreputable person, who, failing to induce you to marry her, has attempted blackmail out of revenge. Leave it all to me, and I will report from day to day. Have no fear as to the result," said Gurly, as he rose and shook hands with his employer.

Within a few minutes after Gurly's departure Morton put on his overcoat, and telling Mrs. Belton that he was going to his club and might not be back till late, he left the house.

He had gone but a few yards when a woman, who had been standing under a lamp-post, stepped out and stood facing him, so that he had to come to a stop.

She was of medium height, veiled, and dressed in black.

Seeing that he could not pass the woman, Donald Morton swallowed a lump that threatened to choke him, and then asked, hoarsely:

“Woman, why do you stop me?”

The woman flung back her black veil, revealing a thin face that must have been very beautiful at one time, and the pallor of which was made more corpse-like in contrast with the large, burning black eyes.

“Do you not know me, Donald Morton?” she asked, coming nearer and raising her face so that the light from the neighboring lamp shone full upon it as she brought it closer to his.

“I—I never saw you before!” he gasped.

“It would be well for me if you never had,” she said, in thrilling tones. “But I am free again. Do you hear me, Donald Morton? I am free!”

“Free from what?” he asked, his courage returning.

“Free from the asylum in which you kept me for years. It has been decided that I was not insane, never was insane—”

“Then the decision was wrong, for you are insane now.”

“That I am not insane,” she said, dashing aside the

veil which had again fallen over her face, "that I am not in my grave, is not your fault."

"Woman, who are you?" he asked, his voice showing both anger and fear.

He made as if he would go on, but again she confronted him resolutely, and a tigerish gleam came into her eyes, and her lips were compressed into a dark line.

"Look at me well, Donald Morton!" she exclaimed. "Look at me well, and say if you have forgotten the wife whom you so cruelly wronged and deceived—the woman whose life you have blasted and whose child you stole!"

"I have no wife—never had a wife," stammered Morton.

"I have not sought you out to press my rights as a wife at this time," she said, with forced calmness.

"That is very considerate of you," he sneered.

"No. I can wait for that. But you know why I am here."

"I certainly do not, and I wish you would permit me to pass."

As if she had not heard him, she continued:

"I come, as a mother, to ask what you have done with our son."

"Your son! What do I know about *your* son?"

"*Our* son, Donald Morton! Tell me at once where I can find him, or I shall follow you night and day till I know the truth."

Again she let her veil fall, and stepped to his

side to show she was prepared to carry out her threat.

Donald Morton stroked his chin nervously, and looked up and down the wind-swept street in which the lamps were wavering and flickering like the light in his own eyes.

Seeing no one in sight, he said, soothingly :

“My dear madam, you mistake me for some other man.”

“Once I mistook you for another man,” she said, with biting bitterness. “Once I believed you pure, and good, and noble ; but I found you out, Donald Morton, I found you out, though it was not till you had blasted the life which you swore before Heaven to protect.”

“I should be glad to hear your story, and to help you, if in my power, but this is neither the time nor place. Now, let me go my way.”

And again he took a forward step, and again she confronted him.

“I must speak with you, and now,” she said, resolutely.

“Well,” he said, doggedly, “go on.”

“Where is my son ?” she demanded.

“How should I know ?”

“Does he live ?”

“I do not know.”

“I say you do.”

“And I repeat that I don’t.”

“Donald Morton, you lie !” she hissed. “Wicked

beyond expression though you are, you could not cast off your own son as you cast off his mother—your wife. Tell me where I can find him, for my heart is dying to have him near it. Tell me this, and I will promise never to come nigh you again.”

She raised her arms appealingly, and her voice, at the close, was pathetic and tear-laden.

“See here; can’t you call to see me at my house?” asked Morton, with another furtive glance about him.

“I can. Where do you live?”

He handed her his card, with the remark:

“You must know where I live, or you could not manage to meet me here.”

“I shall see you at your house, and at your bank, and at your club. I shall cling to you like your shadow till you have told me where I can find my boy.”

With this, she stepped to one side, and Donald Morton laughed and hurried on.

He went to his club to hear the flattery of those who admired him for his wealth, and to be envied by the younger bachelors, who whispered one to the other:

“If I were as rich as Morton, I’d have a wife.”

CHAPTER XXI.

WAS SHE TO BLAME.

NED RAND became so weak and his state so critical as to require constant attendance.

Chiswick could only stay to nurse him during the daytime, for at night he was otherwise engaged, but he would have employed a man to take his place had Mrs. Rand permitted it.

"I want to be near my boy as much as possible," said the anxious mother, when Chiswick made this proposition. "You are giving us great help during the day, and we are very thankful for it. At night Maud and I would prefer to have him all to ourselves."

With the courtesy of manner distinguishing him, Chiswick agreed to this arrangement, though at heart he wanted one of his own creatures to take his place.

He had a strong reason for this.

He saw that day by day Maud was coming under the magnetic influence and surrendering her will to his. He also saw that the existence of Ned Rand was all that prevented his getting supreme control over her.

If Ned Rand were dead, Maud would be guided wholly by himself; so Chiswick reasoned.

To him a human life was no obstacle.

So far as such a nature could admire nobility of character, Chiswick admired Ned Rand; he might have even preferred to do him a service, if such an act did not affect his own purpose; certain it is, he would not hesitate to do him a harm to gain his own ends.

He wanted Ned Rand out of the way, and his knowledge of drugs gave him the opportunity he desired.

Unknown to the doctor, who was an old and a worthy gentleman, Homer Chiswick was murdering the man he was pretending to nurse.

With a patience and self-abnegation that those who knew her might have expected, and a devotion to Ned that would have eased his pain if he could have known it, Maud did her daily duties and bore her daily trials without a murmur.

The fifty dollars she got from Polly Wogley soon went, and to satisfy in part the want that again stared them in the face, Maud thought she would go to the pawnbroker, who had offered her fifteen dollars for the chain and its heart of gold, and leave it with him in pledge.

She unclasped the chain as she had often done before, and again looked at the pictures of her father and mother. Of the former she had no recollection, but the parting from her dead mother, that night when Heaven and earth seemed to have forsaken them—that night when Ned gave her his coat and

took her to his heart, which she was never to leave again—seemed as distinct as the events of yesterday.

Ever since the hour when she found a home with Ned and his mother, Maud had worn the chain and treasured the heart of gold as a precious talisman that, in some way, would protect her from all harm.

By every association this sole remnant and reminder of the parents of whom she remembered so little was exceedingly precious to her, yet, as she stood ready to give her life, if need be, to save Ned, why should she hesitate to part with this bauble, whose chief value lay only in its association?

She left the house, fully determined to pledge the chain and locket, and walked to the pawnshop.

She stood hesitating before the door, which she was about to enter, when a carriage stopped near by, and she heard her name called.

Maud turned and saw Mrs. Moore leaning out of the carriage door and motioning to her.

“My dear child,” said the courtly old lady, “I was on the way to your rooms. I am most fortunate to have found you. Come, get in. Edgar wants to see you, and I must have a long talk with you.”

Glad of an excuse to keep her precious memento a little longer, Maud entered the carriage, and was driven to Mrs. Moore’s house.

She still held the locket and chain in her hand, when Mrs. Moore led her to her own room, saying:

“Before you see Edgar, I must have a long talk

with you, and I am sure you will be very frank with me."

"I have nothing to conceal," said Maud, as she slipped the chain and the heart of gold into her pocket, fearful that Mrs. Moore might see it and guess at the reason for her carrying it in that way.

But Mrs. Moore had caught the glitter of the golden heart, and guessed at the truth, though, as her conversation showed, it did not need this to convince her of Mrs. Rand's poverty.

Mrs. Moore took Maud's hand to assure her that her feelings were in full accord with what she was going to say, and began:

"Edgar has explained to his father and myself about the serious business reverses of your brother, and he claims that he is indirectly to blame for the loss of your cottage. We further know, my dear, that your brother, instead of being a provider, as he would be if in health, must be a serious expense, particularly as you have to employ a nurse."

"That is all true," said Maud, blushing at the thought of being so helpless, rather than from any shame she had of their poverty, "but we have many things which we do not actually need and which we can sell—"

"My child," interrupted Mrs. Moore, "you must give us the right to help you."

"I am sure you have been very kind."

"No, Maud; we have not been kind. I am very

sure we have been unjust. Ah! if instead of opposing our dear boy when he told us of his love for you and begged us to know you, we had been content with his choice—as we surely should have been had we met—he might not be where he is to-day.” And, overcome by the thought, Mrs. Moore bowed her head and covered her face with her hands.

“I am sure you did what you thought best. Your son was rich and well connected. Why should you seem willing to have him marry the adopted daughter of a poor woman—the adopted sister of a mechanic—a girl who knew of not one person in the world with kindred blood in his veins?”

Maud’s voice showed feeling, and her words were such as might have been expected from one of her good sense.

“You must give us the right to help you and the mother and brother who are so dear to you,” said Mrs. Moore, coming back again to the subject uppermost in her mind. “We stand ready to aid you by the right and duty we all have to do good. Still, for the sake of my poor boy, who so loves you, whose pain only your presence can lighten, you must give us this right.”

“This right?” repeated Maud.

And her questioning eyes told that she did not understand Mrs. Moore.

“Yes; Edgar will explain it to you. Go to him, and bear in mind that his father and I unite in urging you to comply with his request. If his mind were

at rest on this point, the doctors think he would improve."

Maud did not question Mrs. Moore further. Instinctively she guessed at what was meant by the word "right," but her heart rose to her mouth and prevented her saying more.

Mrs. Moore led her to the room where Edgar, pale and worn, sat propped up with pillows.

His fine eyes brightened at sight of Maud, and he looked down at his paralyzed hands as if he expected them to be lifted up with their old-time strength and reached out to embrace her.

Mrs. Moore kissed her son and then kissed Maud.

"Tell me, when I see you again," she whispered, as she turned to leave the room, "that you will be one of us."

"When you are not with me," said Edgar, as Maud sat down beside the bed and laid her hand on his, "my heart hungers; when you are by me, it is full. You make me very happy, Maud. God knows how happy I would make you."

"I know—I feel all that," she said.

"You must not think me selfish," he went on. "The doctors say—and I am sure they are right—that if I live I shall be bodily helpless all my days; but I have no desire for such a life, even with your love to bless it. Maud, look at me, my darling, and tell me if you think me truthful and unselfish?"

For reply she rose and kissed him, as a loving sis-

ter might have done, and, unable to control her feelings, she sobbed :

“In my heart of heart I believe you.”

“If you were my wife,” continued Edgar, his deep, dark eyes fixed in worship on her face, “my father and mother would feel free to help those you so love; and—and, Maud, they would not be left childless in their old age, when—when I am no more.”

“Do not speak so! You shall live!” cried Maud.

Then she laid her head against his hand, and moaned:

“Why do those so dear to me have to suffer? Does loving me bring the penalty of sickness and pain?”

“No, no, Maud, my love, my life; loving you is the one thing that brightens all the past, and makes the present endurable. Come nearer and whisper, so that only myself and Heaven can hear it, the one word that will give my parents a daughter.”

Ned, her mother, the impoverished home, flashed through Maud’s mind, and were gone. No selfish impulse could find rest in her heart.

She bent over, kissed him, and said:

“Yes.”

CHAPTER XXII.

A CHANGE.

To a nature so guileless as Maud's, deceit, suspicion, and cunning were simply impossible.

She never had a secret relating to herself; certainly not from Mrs. Rand or Ned.

To the latter she would have gone at once on her return from Mrs. Moore's, after the visit recorded in the last chapter, and told him all, had he been able to understand her story.

As it was, she drew Mrs. Rand out of Chiswick's hearing, and told her what had occurred.

The good woman kissed Maud, and whispered:

"My pet, you have ever acted for the best; you could not do otherwise now. But if it should be God's will that Ned should recover and come back to his mind, don't tell him--leastwise not until he gets to be strong. There, do not ask me to say more at this time," and Mrs. Rand kissed her again and turned away.

As Maud had never attempted to analyze her love for Ned, it could not be expected that she should weigh and examine his affection for her.

In her esteem her brother stood above all others. To her he was at once the handsomest, bravest and

noblest of men. There was something like idolatry in her devotion to him. He was so wrapped up and interwoven with all her thoughts and feelings, with all her life, indeed, that to think of herself was to suggest him.

Until she had whispered that "Yes" to Edgar Moore, Maud had never even given a thought to Ned's marrying, or loving any other woman than his mother and sister.

But in thinking of her own situation, she had to think of him as similarly placed.

She was startled, shocked, when she asked herself: "How should I feel if Ned told me he was going to be married?"

But even now she could not account for the swelling in her throat and the violent beating of her heart. She only felt that if Ned were to marry, it would kill her. She did not ask herself what effect her marriage to Edgar Moore might have on him.

The state of her mind and affections must not be attributed to weakness in either, but rather to her inability—an inability that had its origin in the purity and simplicity of her nature—to distinguish between a profound, deeply-rooted love and the strong natural affection existing between a noble brother and a devoted sister.

Chiswick constituted another disturbing element in Maud's troubled life.

While in the house, she was drawn to him as steel is drawn to the magnet.

She struggled to resist his ever-increasing influence, but her efforts to be free from his mysterious power only weakened her the more.

It would be wrong to imagine that there was the smallest spark of affection in her heart for Chiswick.

When away from his presence she thought of him with horror and loathing; and at such times she was seized with the impulse to fly, it mattered not where, so that flight removed her from him forever.

So conscious was she of her own decreasing strength that she began several notes to Dr. Kenworthy begging him to take Chiswick away, but ashamed of what she thought her own weakness, she destroyed them.

She often felt that if she could summon strength to resist him once, when she was under the strange influence of his eyes, the spell would be broken and she would be able to resist him forever.

Or if Ned's reason returned, so that she could feel the touch of his hand, and have his deep, strong voice bring to her the old-time sense of protection, she imagined she would be forever rid of the impulse to obey Chiswick when near him.

Bright and early the morning after Maud's last visit to the man to whom she was now betrothed, Polly Wogley came to the flat with a basket of delicacies for the sick man.

"I told my mother and Push last night," began Polly, "that Mrs. Rand and Miss Maud must be just about played out a-nursing Ned; 'so,' sez I, 'the

Harlem's friz, an' there ain't anythink worth while a-doin' at the Neptune House, so I'll go down to the flat an' help 'em through.' My mother sez: 'Polly, you always thought a sight of Ned Rand, which shows yer good sense, so go long, an' if there's anythink in the Neptune House that Mrs. Rand thinks would make any of the folks comfortable, tell her to shout it out, an' either Push or me'll fetch it a-runnin'.'"

Without waiting for Mrs. Rand or Maud to say what they really felt, namely, that they were very grateful to Polly for her kindness, she took off her hat and coat and went into the room, where Chiswick was sitting beside the sick man's bed.

Ned was in a drugged sleep, and his parched lips were muttering incoherent nothings.

"Hello, Chiswick? In the name of all that's good, how did you get in here?" was the salutation with which Polly greeted the surprised nurse.

"Hush!" whispered Chiswick; he had never liked Polly. "You will wake him up if you make so much noise."

"I've come to wake him," replied Polly.

She turned quickly and fixed her big, brave eyes on Chiswick's face till he shrank back, as if from a threatened blow; and the eyes that so overmastered Maud fell cowering before this rude, strong woman's defiant gaze.

"You are very kind, I'm sure," sneered Chiswick; "but while you can handle an oar very well, I don't

think you know a great deal about caring for the sick. How could you, when you have always been so strong and vigorous?"

"Accordin' to that," retorted Polly, "only the sick should nuss the sick, an' only the blind should lead the blind, an' only sinners should preach. Chiswick, if you was to nuss me one day for the earache, it'd end in my havin' brain fever that night. You look as if you needed a rest mighty bad, an' I'm here to give it to you. Go put on yer hat an' take a walk by yersel'."

"Did Mrs. Rand tell you to come here?" asked Chiswick, rising in obedience to Polly's imperative gesture.

"No. I've come on my own hook," said Polly, quickly. "I've come because I dreamt, night before last, that you was poisoning Ned Rand. Why do you turn yallerer? I won't say nothink about it if you let me have my way. And"—here she snatched a bottle which she had caught a glimpse of in his pocket—"I'll hold on to this for the present. Now, let me whisper to you, Chiswick, that I know your secret. I overheard you and father. It was you helped him to his death, an' Push will get even with you an' Morton, if he has to swing for it."

Polly's conduct and her words had a stunning effect on Chiswick.

He was as lacking in courage as he was deficient in principle, and that is saying a great deal; but his address and cunning made amends for both.

"I will leave you here for a while," he said, "if it will do you any good. I am sure it will not help him. But, Polly, I know your secret, and for your own sake, I would not have you listen to Ned Rand raving out his love for another woman. Why, he wouldn't marry you if you were worth a million, at least while he loves that other girl as he does."

"Perhaps he loves the girl that you'd like to marry. If so, I admire his taste as much as I despise your tricks. Oh, Push told me all about upsetting the boat and rescuing Miss Maud, just like the play of the Colleen Bawn down in the Bowery Theater. Ha! ha! ha! Chiswick, play again. I hold nothing but trumps, an' I'll save the little joker for last."

Chiswick left the room, beaten and dazed, and wholly unable to reason in the presence of this strong, unsusceptible girl.

He explained to Mrs. Rand that he would be back again in an hour or two, but it so happened that he never again came back to that house as a nurse. Still, it would be a mistake to infer from this that he had changed his policy, or that his mysterious influence over Maud had ceased.

Chiswick had been gone but a few minutes, when Mr. and Mrs. Moore entered the little sitting-room, and were introduced by Maud to Mrs. Rand and Polly.

"I see we are here in advance of the doctors," said Mr. Moore. "My son's physicians have called on Dr. Kenworthy, and they are to come here for

consultation." Then taking Mrs. Rand's hand a second time, he continued: "I have a favor to ask of you, my dear madam, and I ask it for your son's sake."

"Then, sir," she replied, "it is already granted."

"I want you to do as the doctors say. This is no time to permit a foolish pride to interfere with the duty we owe to those we love. Should it become necessary to leave here, you must not question how it is to be done."

"I shall do as you say, Mr. Moore; and I thank you for myself and for my boy," said Mrs. Rand, tears pouring down her care-lined face.

At this juncture heavy steps were heard on the stairs, and immediately after, Dr. Kenworthy, followed by two gray-haired, serious-looking gentlemen, entered the room.

After the customary salutations, they asked how the patient was.

"About the same," replied Mrs. Rand.

The three doctors entered the room, and after a brief examination, one of them bent over so as to feel the sick man's breath on his face, and looking up in surprise, he said:

"That is a morphine sleep!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

STILL PLOTTING.

DONALD MORTON belonged to a number of clubs, still it would be an error to infer from this that he was a social man.

He rather disliked companionship, and, as to society, he knew little or nothing about it.

The clubs, to him, were not places for relaxation or pleasure. He went to them very often to talk over business with some fellow-member, and when this was not the case, he went to see and be seen, and to inhale the incense which sycophants are ever ready to burn under the noses of rich men.

He could hardly be called intemperate, though of late his admirers at his favorite club noticed that he drank a great deal more wine than had been his habit heretofore.

After his encounter with the woman in black, who claimed to be his wife and to be in search of their son, Morton went to a palatial club building, lower down Fifth Avenue than his own fine mansion.

His admirers flocked about him, but the dullest could see that something had happened either to ruffle the temper or to impair the digestion of the man whom they so envied.

When spoken to, he replied in a mechanical, abstracted way, like a man whose mind is full of the world's weightier things.

"Not feeling well, Mr. Morton?" asked an admirer.

"Oh, I'm in excellent health," he replied.

"Thought you didn't look as hearty as usual," said the admirer.

"Never felt better in my life. But I suppose I'm getting old."

"Old!" repeated the admirer, with a glance at those about him, as if asking them to indorse what he was about to say. "Why, it is only last night that a number of us were saying that you are by far the youngest-looking man in the club—for your years."

A number hastened to indorse this opinion.

"I suppose I should feel complimented," said Morton, with a forced smile. "But you know the saying, 'A man is as old as he feels, and a woman as old as she looks.' Sometimes, I feel that I am getting to be an old man."

"Marry a young wife," suggested one, "and that will bring back your youth, if anything can."

This caused a general laugh, and Donald Morton pretended to join in it, but there was a pain at his heart, a pain intensified by the speaker's words, that was beyond the power of the brightest to conceive.

After some further desultory talk, Morton lit a cigar, and getting an evening paper he went off by himself, put on his glasses, and pretended to be engrossed in his reading.

But he could not distinguish a word; he did not try to. He saw the confused black and white lines, nothing more.

The meeting with that woman had completely upset him.

For years he had thought of her, when he thought at all, as dead and forever out of his way.

But she was alive, there could not be the slightest doubt of that after his adventure that night; and her coming added another complication to the difficulties of his unenviable position.

As he sat there, with his back to the drop light and the paper trembling in his hand, he glanced over his past life.

Anxious though he was to appear a model of propriety and good judgment to his admirers, he could not hide from himself the errors—if not the crimes—of which he had been guilty.

He could never bring himself to think that anything he had ever done or left undone was a crime.

He excused to himself his treatment of the woman he had met, by imagining his marriage “a youthful folly.”

He recalled that he first met her when she was barely eighteen years of age and he a little over twenty-two.

She was the daughter of an Italian music teacher, a man who had been a noble in his own land, but who had been expatriated with his friend, the famous Garibaldi.

Morton was poor at the time, and as the girl loved him fondly and foolishly, she agreed to keep the marriage a secret for the present—the most foolish thing any woman ever did.

Just when it seemed that the old Italian must know his daughter's secret, he died, and Morton breathed easier.

After this he began to prosper, but instead of keeping his wife and baby boy near him, he sent them abroad; and, for some years, he regularly supplied them with money.

When the money stopped, the poor woman returned to America with her son, now a handsome lad of nine.

She went to see her husband, but did not take the boy, for she wished to keep from him all knowledge of his father's perfidy.

She demanded that Donald Morton should fulfill his promise.

He refused, for he could not confess his marriage without showing to the world—to the world that believed him so manly—that he was thoroughly infamous.

Then, as now, he stopped at no obstacle that opposed his success.

By means well known, and still, alas! frequently employed to get rid of an objectionable person, Donald Morton succeeded in having his wife sent to an insane asylum in another State, and for fifteen years he paid her expenses, but gave her no other thought.

He gave an English physician about to return to his own country five thousand dollars, on condition that he should take the boy to England and keep him as his own child.

From that day to this Donald Morton had not heard of or from his son.

He believed the boy dead; yet there were times when, realizing that he was past the prime of life and that old age was coming on apace, Donald Morton felt that he would be less lonely if he had his son with him.

As he walked slowly home from the club that night, he recalled the fact that this son, if living, must be now a young man of five-and-twenty.

"And if he looks anything like her, he must be about as handsome a fellow as can be found."

These words passed Morton's lips as he was in the act of ascending his own front door-steps.

He had the dead-latch-key in his hand, and he was about to look for the keyhole, when he was frightened cold at seeing a man standing close up against the door.

"Who are you?" he asked, his teeth chattering, and his heart thumping from side to side in a way to make him reel.

"Don't be afraid. I'm your dear friend, Chiswick," said the owner of that name, with a low, mocking laugh.

"It is midnight. If you want to see me, call to-morrow," said Morton, his courage returning.

"Midnight; yes, but I have been here for two hours."

"I did not send for you."

"If you had I shouldn't have come, Mr. Morton. You are no longer my master. You are my cashier, my uncle, who gives funds without security. Come, I am broke."

Chiswick reached out his right hand, and worked the index finger to indicate his haste.

Donald Morton bit his lip. He had drank enough wine at the club to give him a fictitious courage, but all the wine in the world could not change his true nature, or give him pluck that was not of the most fleeting character.

"I have half a notion to call an officer and have you arrested," he said.

"Better have me arrested than go to the trouble of murdering me," sneered Chiswick.

"Chiswick!"

"I am listening."

"You are the coolest villain I ever met. You will be hanged before you are much older. Of that I am sure. Yet I must confess I admire your talents," said Morton as he drew out his pocket-book.

"I will never be hanged on your testimony."

As Chiswick spoke he snatched the wallet from Morton's hand, quickly rifled it of all its money, then flung it on the step and vanished.

Here was a good chance for Morton to have had the young man arrested on what it would be easy to

prove was a case of highway robbery ; but, though he thought about it, he had not the nerve to do it.

He picked up the pocket-book, entered the house and went to bed.

He would have slept till late the following morning, had not Mrs. Belton, about eight o'clock, rapped on his door and called in :

“ Mr. Gurly's here, and he says he'd like to see you right away.”

“ All right,” said Morton.

But he evidently thought it all wrong, for he got out of bed cursing Gurly and every one else, himself excepted, with the greatest vigor and bitterness.

“ Sorry to trouble you,” Gurly began, “ but as you haven't had your breakfast and I haven't had mine, I'll take a cup of coffee and a roll with you, and at the same time tell you why I have come so early.”

Morton had to agree to this; and when they were seated at the table, and the waiting-maid told that she need not return till she was rung for, Gurly went on to tell of the wonderful discovery he had made, which was the reason for his coming at so unseasonable an hour.

Through his spies he had learned that Maud Rand was in the habit of visiting Mrs. Moore's house every day, and that she did not go there in a menial capacity was shown by the fact that she came and left in the family carriage, and that more than once she had been seen out driving with Mrs. Moore.

"I see nothing in that to be alarmed at," said Morton.

"No; not in that alone; but the Moores have taken a great interest in Ned Rand. They have had him moved to elegant apartments in the Waterloo Building, and two of the finest physicians in the city are waiting on him. Chiswick is no longer there as a nurse, Coots's daughter having taken his place," said Gurly between sips of coffee.

"Well, Gurly, I pay you to interpret such things to me. What do you make out of it?"

"It hasn't progressed far enough for me to say. But I don't like his having rich friends."

"Do you think this Polly Wogley might be bribed to assist us?" asked Morton, drawing back from the table without having eaten anything.

"If she's at all like her father, I should say 'yes.' But women are always uncertain quantities. And talking about women reminds me of another remarkable matter, in which you may be interested."

"What is that, Gurly?"

"Why, yesterday," replied Gurly, "a strange, foreign-looking woman, claiming to be your wife, came to my office, and asked me to take charge of her case. Mighty funny that, wasn't it, Mr. Morton?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TERRIBLE BLOW.

WHAT Gurly told Morton about Ned Rand was literally true.

The doctors brought by Mr. Moore discovered two things: first, that the patient was being poisoned for the want of fresh air; and, second, that he was being drugged to death with morphine.

Dr. Kenworthy, who had charge of the case, was a reputable physician, so that he was believed when he declared that he had never prescribed morphine for this patient, and that he had instructed Chiswick, who had graduated as a doctor, to try no experiments.

"But I'm inclined to think he did try experiments," said Polly Wogley, who remained near the doctors while they were in consultation. "I dreamt that Chiswick was poisoning Ned Rand, an' I felt it was my duty to come right down here an' stop. Here's a bottle I snatched out of Chiswick's pocket; if it ain't morphine, then I'm a soaring angel."

Polly handed out the bottle; and Dr. Kenworthy said, after all had examined and exchanged meaning glances:

"I will take charge of this."

And so it came about that, for Maud's sake, the sick man and his mother were moved to a splendid suite of apartments near by, where servants and everything else that generosity could suggest or wealth supply were provided.

A trained nurse took Polly Wogley's place, which she yielded gracefully when she learned that it would be for Ned's good.

Still, every morning she came down from Harlem to see how it went with the sick man; and every evening Push, with the same settled, sullen look on his face, appeared to make the same inquiry.

Under these changed conditions Ned rallied, and his powerful vitality began to throw off the disease and to recover from the effects of the poison administered by Chiswick.

The clouds drifted away from his brain, and the sunlight of reason illuminated the mind that had been so long befogged and storm-tossed.

Reason came in the advance of strength.

Ned had no conception of the length of time he had been ill, and when he roused up, like one from a heavy sleep, he saw that he was in a strange place, but he had not the faintest recollection of his coming.

His mother and Maud had been told by the nurse that a change was coming to the sick man, and so they were by his side when the clouds lifted and the old expression came back to his worn face, and the old light of love and affection beamed in the eyes. He turned toward them.

"Mother! Maud!" he exclaimed, and he reached out his arms to greet them like one who returns from a long and stormy voyage, or from a battle-field exhausted by a fierce struggle with death.

They kissed him; and then he looked anxiously at their faces, so pale and careworn that it seemed as if years must have passed since he saw them before.

"We have all been very sick," he said.

"You have been, my boy; but, thank Heaven, you are over the danger," said Mrs. Rand, and, unable to control her emotion, she dropped on her knees by the bed and sobbed upon his breast.

The entrance of Dr. Kenworthy, who still had charge of the case, prevented the excitement which must have followed Maud's explanation of the situation.

Taking the ladies to one side, the doctor said:

"You must remember our patient is still very weak, and what we have to guard against now is a relapse. It will be better not to talk to him about business or anything that may excite him. There will be plenty of time to tell him all that has happened when his safety is assured."

On this excellent advice they decided to act; and after that, until Ned's strength was well restored, every effort was made to direct his mind from those subjects in which he had been so deeply interested before being taken down.

The following incident will show how clear Ned's mind was and how keen his powers of observation.

As Maud sat beside the bed stroking his forehead with her cool, soft palm, he looked at her with mingled love and curiosity, as one will look who sees a change in a familiar face but cannot tell the cause.

At length he asked, with a gasp :

“Maud, where is the chain and the heart of gold?”

Involuntarily she raised her hand to her throat, and a deathly pallor overspread her face as she answered :

“It is lost.”

“Lost, Maud?”

“Yes; lost.”

It will be remembered that Maud went to the pawn office to get an advance on the chain and locket, but changed her purpose on meeting Mrs. Moore. Instead of replacing the locket about her neck she put it in her pocket, forgot all about it in the excitement of the scene that followed in Edgar Moore's room, and when she came to look for it, on retiring that night, it was gone.

She had spoken to Mrs. Moore and her mother about her loss. It was to her like the death of a well-beloved and life-long friend. But all search failed to reveal the whereabouts of the heart of gold.

Ned did not question Maud further at this time.

He guessed that she had sold it or parted with it for his sake.

He saw that she was pained; so he treated the loss lightly, saying:

“Do not fret about it, dear sister. We shall find the locket, no doubt. But the true heart of gold must remain with you forever.”

After this Ned began to improve in a way that surprised his doctors.

Strength came to his limbs and hope to his heart ; and he turned his eyes from the contracted limits and gloom of the grave, which he had been facing, to see the glorious possibilities of long and happy years stretching out before him.

His mother told him that he owed his restoration to health and his improved surroundings to Mr. Moore, who in this way sought to undo a part of the injury that had been done to Ned's affairs by the accident that had befallen Edgar.

At length Ned got so strong that he was able to move about again ; and just as he was thinking of going out to renew his search for work, Mr. Moore called to see him, and said :

“Mr. Rand, as soon as you are able to go to work you must let me know, for I have found an opening for you which I think will suit.”

“I think I am ready now, sir,” said Ned. “I know that if I were at work I should feel much more like myself.”

Mr. Moore then explained that, owing to the death of one of the firm who had acted as the superintendent of a large paper factory just outside of the city line, another partner, with a small capital, was wanted to fill the vacancy.

"I can advance the required capital," said Mr. Moore, "and arrange it so that you can pay me from year to year. You see, it will be purely a business matter, and I will be getting a good interest for my money."

Mr. Moore added the last sentence when he saw that Ned was about to protest against this kindness.

"And," continued the old gentleman, "in addition to your profits from the interest you will have in the factory, you will get a salary of twenty-five hundred dollars a year as superintendent."

The surprise and delight of Aladdin when he rubbed the magic lamp, and became the master of all wealth and power, were not greater than Ned Rand's at the prospect opened up by this noble old gentleman.

We cannot attempt to depict his gratitude. Suffice it to say he accepted, and within one week he was at work.

First, however, he moved into a house not far from his place of business; and now the only drawback to his perfect happiness was that Maud spent so much of her time at Mr. Moore's house.

Yet Ned was reconciled to this when he learned that she was helping to care for poor Edgar, whose life lamp flickered so low at times as to fill his watchers with despair, and again would flash so high and steadily as to lead to the belief that his recovery must be speedy and perfect.

Ned gained courage with his changed circum-

stances. He began to see now that the secret dream of years might be realized by making Maud his wife.

It was so delightful to secretly think of this that he did not even speak to his mother about it, nor did she again urge him, as she had often done before, to declare to Maud his love and ask her to be his.

He imagined that Maud shrank from him, and that she seemed less at ease in his presence than formerly.

She kissed him, as had ever been her custom, but he could see and feel that the old girlish manner had changed.

One evening when they were alone he took her hand and drew her to his side. Unable longer to control the feeling that had been pent up in his heart for years, he told her of his love, and asked her to be his wife.

Oh, Ned, Ned," she cried, "do not speak so. I am the wife of another—the wife of Edgar Moore!" and she dropped on her knees and clung convulsively to his strong hands.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER CHANGE.

NED RAND did not show anger, disappointment or jealousy when, from Maud's lips, he learned that she was the wife of another; indeed, he blamed himself for ever having imagined that she could be anything to him but a sister.

Quick as the lightning's flash he took in the situation.

He recalled the pleasant home to which he had been removed, and the doctors and nurses, all engaged by Edgar Moore's family, who had literally lifted him up in their arms and carried him to the highlands of life from the valley of the shadow of death.

He also saw that it was the same influence that had taken him from idleness—which he loathed—and poverty—which unmanned him—and placed him in a position where his abilities could have full play and his industry would be rewarded.

It was through Maud that all this had come about; and, while she was dearer to him than all earth's wealth, yet his noble heart realized that she had made a sacrifice to save him.

"We thought," sobbed Maud, as she still clung to

his knees, "that it would be better not to tell you this till you were strong. In the past, oh, my brother, I could not read your feelings—could not interpret my own heart. Do not blame me! Do not blame me!"

"Blame you, my Maud!" he cried, as he stooped and raised her up, and folded her to his breast, as on that night of storm in the long ago; "why should I blame you? You could do nothing that you did not think for the best. May God bless you and him; and may he be spared to make your life as happy as I would have it. There! there! do not sob; let us wake from the dreams that were so sweet, and make our life duties just as pleasant by doing them well."

He kissed her again, and stroked the yellow hair, as had been his habit when, as a child, she ran to meet him returning from his work at night.

Mrs. Rand dreaded to tell Ned what had happened; but apart from this fear, she thought it better that he should learn the truth from Maud's lips.

She met her son immediately after the scene just narrated, and she saw that he knew all.

"I am glad, my boy," she said, as she kissed him, "that you bear it so well. It was for your sake—for all our sakes, but her own."

"I know it; I feel it. May Heaven bless her," said Ned, choking down the emotion that would rise up from his heart, in despite of all the philosophy that came down from his head.

This incident brought no change to the household save that Ned insisted that Maud should spend more

time with Edgar; even now he hardly dared to think of him as her husband.

Maud's marriage had been so quietly arranged that the outside world was kept in complete ignorance of it.

After meeting Maud, Mr. Moore and his wife were so charmed with the beauty of her person and character that they would have approved of their son's choice, even had no accident befallen him; but, under the circumstances, the marriage was arranged in the hope that her presence and knowledge of possession, acting on his mind, would react beneficially on his shattered nervous organization.

Poor fellow! the accident that deprived him of every physical power but speech lifted him into the realms of the heroic, for he was crushed in stopping a runaway team that otherwise would have dashed the occupants of the carriage to death.

It seemed from the first that this strange yet most reasonable marriage was to prove more beneficial to the wounded youth than all the skill of the doctors.

He began to rally from the hour she came to him at his mother's request.

And the doctors—who among themselves had reached the conclusion that, no matter how long Edgar might live, he never could move his limbs again—were surprised to find him propped up in bed, and writing with his left hand.

Edgar Moore's education and surroundings were

all calculated to make him selfish; and it must be confessed he was selfish, and had been that most disagreeable of all human things—"a spoiled child."

But he must have been naturally noble, else the accident—which would have crushed the spirits of most young men—could not have lifted him up till his better self was revealed in all its thoughtful manliness.

"With you to live for," he would say to Maud, after she had been reading to him, or after she had come up from the parlor—not so far away but her playing and singing could reach his ears through all the open doors—"with you to live for, I must be strong again. But if the worst should come, my darling, I can say with Schiller's *Thekla*:

'I have known all the happiness earth has for me;
'Tis the bliss of my living and loving.'

One evening, while Maud was reading to him, Mrs. Moore came into the room, and said:

"My dear boy, Mr. Morton has called to see you. You know he has sent daily inquiries about you. Do you feel strong enough?"

"Oh, I am quite strong enough," said Edgar; "and even if I were not, I should like to see Mr. Morton. Maud, my love, perhaps it would be better if you went to mother's room."

"Yet I should prefer to stay," said Maud.

"Then," said Edgar, with a pleased smile, "I should prefer to have you stay."

Donald Morton, purple-faced, and with as light a

step as a man of his bulk could make, came up the stairs and entered Edgar's room.

He did not see Maud, though he might easily have done so had not his eyes been centered on the pale youth whose face was turned toward him.

"Ah, my poor fellow, I am sorry to see you in this way," said Morton, reaching out his hand.

"You see I cannot take your hand, Mr. Morton. I am very helpless. Pray sit down, for I want to have a chat with you."

Morton sat down with his back to Maud, whom he caught a glimpse of, and he, no doubt, thought her a servant, for he at once began to assure Edgar of his high regard, and to repeat again and again his profound regret at the great calamity that had befallen his dear young friend.

Edgar was too well bred to show this man the contempt in which he held him, and too sincere to give him the impression that this visit afforded him any pleasure.

Edgar also saw, and in view of what he was going to say it amused him greatly, that Morton was unaware of Maud's presence.

After the usual questions about the accident, and the usual wondering that he was not killed outright, and the usual hopes that he would be as strong as ever very soon, Mr. Morton asked :

"Do you know what has become of that fellow Rand, and his sister?"

"Yes, I think I do," said Edgar, with a smile that

puzzled Morton. "And, by the way, I am very glad you spoke about Mr. Rand. You remember you wanted me to foreclose the mortgage you held on his cottage."

"I do; but your injury forced me to give the case to another lawyer. Rand had every opportunity to pay me the balance, but the truth is that though on the surface the fellow seemed all well enough, he was not to be trusted."

"Yet, if I had not been hurt, I should have had the mortgage taken by a friend, and so saved the poor fellow over three thousand dollars, which he had saved and paid you. No, Mr. Morton, you can never make me believe that you treated that young man right."

"I had the law on my side," said Morton, at a loss to understand the change that had come over the young attorney.

"Very true; but you know, and I know, that some of the vilest crimes—the most barefaced and inhuman robberies—are committed under cover of the law. I shall continue to think that your treatment of Mr. Rand is of this class," said Edgar, a pink flush coming to his pale cheeks to prove the indignation he still felt.

Morton coughed, and his face seemed to swell and grow redder; but he managed to control his voice as he said:

"You are young and generous, and do not know these people as I do."

“What people?”

“Rand, and the young woman he calls his sister. But she is no sister of his; she’s a creature that Rand picked out of the gutter; and, if the truth were known, she is or ought to be—”

“To be what?” asked Edgar, seeing the other hesitate.

“Rand’s wife,” stammered Morton.

“How could she be Rand’s wife and mine too? Maud, my love, come forward and put this wretch to the blush!” cried the indignant Edgar.

And Maud, with the grace and hauteur of an angered princess, faced the man who had just slandered Ned.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A NEW FIRM.

IT is folly to attempt a description of the indescribable.

Donald Morton, utterly dumbfounded and confused, had still enough sense left to lead him from the presence of the afflicted youth and his beautiful wife.

He left the room without saying a word; and, finding his hat in the hall, he hurried out with the feeling of a sneak who hears the cry of "Police!" behind him.

His carriage was waiting for him at the door, and he leaped in.

He was in the act of banging the door shut, when he felt it held back, and looking up, he saw Chiswick before him, with a scornful smile on his thin lips.

"What the devil do you want?" demanded Morton.

"I want to talk with you, and I can do it as well riding as in any other way. I prefer a back seat."

As Chiswick spoke, he sprang into the carriage, took a seat beside Morton, and closed the door.

"Get out, you impudent dog," thundered Morton, "or I'll call the police!"

"Call the police, my dear sir; or, better still, drive me to the police station and have me locked up. But before doing so, think of the consequences to yourself. If I go to jail at your hands, I shall return the compliment by sending you to the penitentiary," said Chiswick, with the cool maliciousness so peculiar to him.

"Tell me what you want," said Morton, prudence coming to his rescue, for he realized that this young man had him in his power, even more than had the murdered Coots.

"Order your carriage to move on. It will attract attention if we sit talking in this way before Mr. Moore's residence. Besides which I want to have a good long chat with you at your own house."

Seeing that this was the best thing to do under the circumstances, Morton ordered the driver to take him home.

When they had reached his house and were sitting in the reception-room, Morton said, with a business-like air:

"Now, sir, what have you to say to me?"

"A great deal—a very great deal," replied the master of the situation.

"And it will end as usual in your begging money?"

"It will result in my *demanding* it. I don't propose to beg while I have such claims upon you. Why, Mr. Morton," laughed Chiswick. "I propose that you shall share your fortune with me, just as if I was your own dear, affectionate son."

"I have no son, sir," gasped Morton; and he tried to read in the young man's face the hidden meaning he imagined he saw in his words, but without success.

"I didn't say you had a son; I simply gave an illustration. Heaven has not been very kind to me, but the divine wrath might have cursed me with such a father as you, but fortunately I am fatherless; unfortunately, perhaps, I am motherless. And so having only myself to care for, I propose to do it to the best of my ability. Isn't that right?"

"Where were you born?" asked Morton, with a start.

"I don't know."

"Have you no memory of your parents?"

"See here, Mr. Morton, I came to talk about your relatives, not about mine; and I am determined not to be diverted from my purpose by any imaginary interest of yours in my antecedents," said Chiswick, decisively.

As he spoke he fumbled in an inside breast-pocket, and, after some searching, he brought to light a little box which he laid on his knee and covered with his hand. Then he continued:

"Coots told me his story—about the manner in which you got possession of your brother's property, by driving his poor widow to the grave and hiring him to make away with her child—"

"Coots lied!" exclaimed Morton.

"Well, I thought he did also, so I set to work to prove his story; and I succeeded so well that, with

the papers now in my possession and the contents of the little box covered with my hand, I can show the world what you are and who Maud Rand is."

"Maud Rand is the wife of Edgar Moore," said Morton, anxious to change the conversation.

On hearing this, Chiswick started and turned a deeper olive.

His thin lips drew back from his even white teeth, and an expression of mingled astonishment, hate and doubt came into his deep black eyes. At length he managed to hiss:

"It is a lie! Why should she marry a man on the grave's brink?"

"You must ask her why. But not an hour ago I saw this Maud Rand in Edgar Moore's room, and in her presence he told me that she was his wife," persisted Morton.

"Better be his wife than Ned Rand's," said Chiswick. "But to come back to my story—I hope you are interested."

"As much as a man can be in a lie which he has heard often before, and which was concocted by a thief for the purpose of blackmailing him," said Morton, falling back on his strong line of defense.

Without seeming to notice the other's words or manner, Chiswick completed his story and then added, by way of climax:

"When Ned Rand took the child from Coots, the night he first met her, and the police officer took Coots to the station-house, the poor little orphan had

a gold chain about her neck, and to this chain was attached a locket, shaped like a heart. The locket contained two pictures, which the child said were those of her father and mother. The mother's dead face was not what it had been when her picture was taken, yet it proved the child's story—"

"Who told you this?" asked Morton.

"Maud herself. Oh, she may have married Moore to secure his property, but I know where her heart is. I am her friend, and we understand each other. You may smile incredulously, but I can prove my words. The chain with its heart of gold was but seldom taken from her neck, and never has it been in the hands of another for five minutes since it came into her possession as a child, yet she shows her faith by intrusting it to me," said Chiswick, opening the box and holding up the heart of gold.

Morton had seen this before, when, ignorant of his kinship, he asked Maud Rand to be his wife. Still he had so little faith in Chiswick that he asked to look at the locket.

"No, no," replied Chiswick, "but you can see the pictures. Ah, no one would think that handsome, frank-looking man was your brother."

He opened the lids of the locket, and still keeping hold of the chain, he let Morton examine them.

"I do not recognize either face," said Morton, tossing the locket away. "But conceding, for the sake of argument, that all you say is true, what do you propose to make out of it?"

"That's business; and that is what I have come to talk about. You have tried to damn my character after having failed to take my life, but this I am willing to forgive, on condition that you take me into a full partnership in your business, my interest to be represented by the fortune which your brother left in your hands for his wife and child."

"You are modest, and I must confess I like you for it," said Morton, with his eyes on the young man's strangely fascinating face.

"I am glad you have learned to appreciate me. What is your answer?" asked Chiswick, as he returned the locket and chain to the box and the box to his pocket.

"If I wished to treat you like the crazy youth I once thought you," said Morton, with a seriousness of manner that showed he was in earnest, "I would say 'yes' at once, and then proceed to get you out of the way. But the more I see you and the longer I think about it, the more convinced I am that I cannot get along without you, and that with you I can set the world at defiance. Can you not give me till to-morrow night to think about it? In the meantime, as a proof of my sincerity, I will take you down to my bank and place ten thousand dollars to your credit. What do you say?"

"I say yes," said Chiswick, taking the other's hand.

And so these men came again to an understanding, each dropping the mask from his face, and standing revealed in his true character.

Chiswick, as he rode down town with Morton, felt that he had achieved a great triumph, and for the first time in months Morton breathed easier, for he had made an ally of the man he had most to dread.

Morton explained, as they approached the bank, his interview with Edgar Moore, and the charge he had himself made against Ned Rand.

“Chiswick,” he said, “I intimated that Rand was a scoundrel, and to prove my words true, I would spend a third of my fortune. Ah, how I hate him and that girl!”

“The girl will never trouble you if you keep your word with me,” said Chiswick. “And as to Rand, why, I can arrange it so that he will be in jail—the pal of criminals—within the month. You hired old Gurly to hunt me down. Oh, don’t deny it. Let us keep on being frank. Now, have Gurly work in with me, and we shall have the whole world in a sling. What do you say to that, Mr. Morton?”

“I shall leave the whole affair to you, Chiswick. Free me from the things that have been cursing my life of late, and I shall treat you, not only as my partner, but my son.”

And again the two shook hands, to prove their mutual understanding.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DONALD MORTON'S WIFE.

IT may seem very strange, if not highly improbable, that two men who knew each other so well, and had been so false to each other in the past, should have changed from bitter opponents to strong and trustful allies.

It is for us to state the fact, not to explain the reason; but it is very certain that, from this time on, Chiswick and Morton trusted each other, and that something like friendship sprang up between them.

Gurly, when told of what Morton had done with Chiswick, declared that the alliance was a stroke of genius, and that the three could now face any danger that threatened, confident of success.

One night, about a week after the events narrated in the preceding chapter, Morton, Chiswick, and Gurly were sitting in the reception room smoking and conversing, when their attention was attracted by the loud talking of two women in the hall outside.

Chiswick recognized one of the voices as belonging to Mrs. Belton, the housekeeper; but there was no reason why he should tremble and listen, with protruding eyes, to a sound so familiar.

"I came to see him, and I must see him."

"But he is engaged."

"Then I can wait till he is disengaged."

"That will not be till late to-night."

"I do not care if it is till to-morrow."

"But you have no right to enter the house in this way," said Mrs. Belton, in a loud voice.

"Right! Pray, who are you?" demanded the stranger, with a fierce indignation in her impassioned tones.

"I am Mrs. Belton, Mr. Morton's housekeeper."

"And I am Mrs. Morton—Mr. Donald Morton's wife. I shall stay here till I see him. Do you hear me, madam?"

This conversation in the hall could be distinctly heard by the three men in the sitting-room.

Donald Morton rose and went out, closing the door quickly behind him.

"The same lady is here," stammered Mrs. Belton, when she caught sight of Morton, "and she says she must see you."

"Where is she?" asked Morton, looking up and down the hall.

"In there," said Mrs. Belton, pointing to the library.

"Go up stairs, Mrs. Belton; this woman is insane, and it is better that I should see her alone."

"Shall I call the police, sir?"

"No, no, no! Please go to your room."

Mrs. Belton went to her room; and Morton, with

an unsteady step, entered the library, where, in the center of the room, directly over that part of the carpet stained by the blood of the murdered Coots, stood the woman who claimed to be his wife.

As soon as Morton left the reception-room Gurly sprang up on tip-toe, and quietly opening the door that led into the hall, he whispered:

“The boss has a woman scrape on hand. Ah! the women, the women, dear boy; there is no living with them nor without them.” Then beckoning to Chiswick, Gurly chuckled, “Come, we can have some fun listening.”

Chiswick’s notion of the proprieties did not prevent his immediate acceptance of this invitation to play the eavesdropper. This is what they overheard:

“Donald Morton, you see I am here again.”

“I thought, madam, that you had decided to place your case in the hands of a lawyer, a certain Mr. Gurly?” said Morton, who neither asked his visitor to sit down nor took a seat himself.

“So I did, sir; but to my horror, I have learned that this Gurly is in your employ and is one of your tools—”

“That is false,” interrupted the unblushing Morton. “But there are more lawyers than Gurly in the big city of New York; why not employ them?”

“Why does the man in the midst of the desert die of thirst? The wretch Gurly has taken all the money I had,” cried the woman, frantically.

"I will give you all the money you want if you give me a written pledge that you will never bother me again," said Morton, getting courage from the poor woman's evident distress.

"Villain!" she shouted. "I am not seeking money from you, though that I shall have as a right; nor am I asking to come here as your wife, though my right to that I shall also prove."

"Why, then, are you here?"

"I come here from an impulse too holy for you to understand. Donald Morton, the long years during which you kept me in a mad-house only strengthened my sense of the degradations to which you subjected me. You forced me away from my child, yet the one spark of hope that remained in my heart, the one ray of light that brightened the blackness of all those years of living death, was the belief that one day I should be free again, and that I should find my child, my son, and hold him again to the heart you have broken."

"I do not understand your raving. I know nothing about you, and so can know nothing about your son. Leave this house," said Donald Morton, pointing to the door.

"I shall leave, and I shall promise never to see you again," cried the poor woman, as she clasped her thin white hands and raised them above her head, "if you will only tell me where I can find my child—our son."

"You say that you have been released from an in-

sane asylum ; now if you do not wish to return there you will leave this house and cease to annoy me in future."

"Do you mean that, sir ?"

"I do."

"Think better of it, Donald Morton," she said, in a freezing tone. "Oftentimes I have wondered whether I was sane or insane, living or dead ; but I have always come back to a realization of the life you have blasted by falling on my knees and cursing you. And in my prayers for a champion by day, and in my dreams of an avenger by night, I have seen my son, the slayer of his father, the avenger of his mother's wrongs. I shall go out into the darkness to-night—all time is alike dark to me now. And you will go on feeling secure in the strength of your wealth and the fidelity of your tools. But know this, Donald Morton, that as surely as God's sun will rise to-morrow, there is a Nemesis on your track that, in the not distant future, will strip you of your gilding and hold you up in all your moral hideousness to the execration of a horrified world."

When the woman ceased speaking she let fall her veil, and the room seemed to grow suddenly darker for the absence of her flashing black eyes.

Donald Morton had staggered against a bookcase, and as she swept past him and into the hall she drew her skirts aside lest they might touch his hated person.

"I have had quite an adventure with an insane

woman who imagines she is my wife," said Morton, on re-entering the room where Gurly and Chiswick sat, looking as if they had not overheard one word of the very strange interview in the library.

"It's an old dodge," said Gurly. "Why, there ain't a rich, middle-aged bachelor in the city that hasn't had just such an experience. Read the papers and you'll see that every time a rich old bachelor dies, some woman pops up in black and claims to be his wife; and to avoid a scandal and a lawsuit, the true heirs generally buy her off. But you are not dead yet by a long chalk;" and Gurly laughed and rubbed his hands as if he had said something funny.

"No, but I fear I soon shall be dead, if my true friends do not help me to get rid of these annoyances that are wearing my life out," said Morton, dropping into a chair and lighting a fresh cigar.

"It will be an easy matter to dispose of that woman," said Chiswick, "and if you will leave it to me, I will promise you to have her out of the way within a week."

"Do that," replied Morton, "and I will make you a present of the handsomest turnout that money can buy in New York. But let her go. We were talking about this fellow Rand when that insane creature came in. I said Rand was a scoundrel, and to prove my charge I would be willing to give a great deal."

"It will be an expensive job," said Gurly, assuming his professional manner; "but it can be done."

“Why should it be expensive?”

“Because men of a certain stripe must be hired to go into the job, and such people are high-priced, for they’ll have to take big risks. Now, there’s a gang that hangs round the Neptune House—Coots’s old friends—and they all know Ned Rand. If we can keep the affair from Polly Wogley and her mother, I know Push will work in, and we can win as easy as turning over your hand. But, as I said before, it will need money. Don’t you agree with me, Chiswick?”

“I do, Mr. Gurly. And had it not been for that same Polly Wogley—confound her—I’d have settled Ned when I was nursing him. But I know the men for the work, and they must be paid.”

“Pay them their price, Chiswick, and come to me for all the money you need. There is no use in dilly-dallying with this unpleasant and very dangerous work. Let us get it off our hands as soon as possible, and then we can live peaceful, upright lives.”

“To which sentiments I should like to drink, Mr. Morton,” said Gurly.

“Good!” was the reply; and Morton summoned a servant to bring in wine.

Morton was not a judge of wines, but as all his rich friends at the club pretended to be, he thought it the proper thing to keep the most expensive liquors in his cellar.

Busy men but rarely make drunkards, but of late

Donald Morton, though busier than usual, sought, when alone, the relief that a drunken oblivion brings.

Wine was brought in, and the first bottle vanished before the servant was out of hearing.

Morton touched the bell, and told the man to fetch up a half-dozen bottles of the same brand.

"I feel a little out of sorts," he explained, "and if you gentlemen have not other engagements, we can make a night of it, and at the same time talk about this woman and Ned Rand, though they are in no way connected."

"Except," laughed Gurly, "that they are both in the way."

Bottle after bottle of the wine was opened and poured out. The three men did not sip it, they poured it down.

Hard-headed though all were, the liquor began to tell at length, for each man began to reveal the peculiar weakness of his own character.

Morton became bold, boastful, and vulgar.

Gurly told stories of his success at the bar, and related with great gusto his experience with the criminal classes.

Chiswick grew yellower, more reserved, and seemingly more suspicious, while he showed a strong disposition to combat everything said by the others.

But the liquor did not blind them to the work they had been planning; indeed, its effect was to make them more suggestive and inventive, while it

wholly obliterated that show of moral restraint which distinguished their more sober interviews.

Though virtually in partnership with Morton now, Homer Chiswick did not live at the house as formerly.

He did not dare to do so, for he well knew that the new alliance had made no change in Morton's true feelings.

It was well on toward daylight when Gurly and Chiswick left their employer's house and went to their own sleeping-places.

As the two men stood holding each other's hands at a corner not far from Chiswick's hotel, Gurly said:

"Let us get this man and woman out of the way, and then we'll be in clover."

"So we will," laughed Chiswick. "And then we'll have the old man all to ourselves. Ha, ha, ha! No matter who loses, I am playing to win."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CONSPIRACY.

BLISSFULLY ignorant of the efforts and schemes that were being made for his overthrow, Ned Rand went on with his work.

It would hardly be correct to say that he was happier under his improved worldly circumstances, for comfort and happiness are by no means synonymous.

By a closer attention to business, if that were possible, during the day, and by reading his favorite authors, and carrying on his "pet studies," as he called them, at night, Ned sought to keep down the thought that came ever uppermost in his mind.

With his high moral sense he felt that it was wicked to love Maud as he had been doing. She was now the wife of another, and the old feeling must be banished forever.

He knew that friendship often ended in love, and, on the principle of a rule's working both ways, he reasoned that love could end in friendship. How could he, with his generous, simple ways, know that there never had been such a case recorded in all the history of human emotions?

The very effort not to think of her made him think

of her the more. Even in his studies he missed her; and in reading his favorite authors, every passage they had admired together brought her the more vividly before his mind.

Mrs. Rand tried to take Maud's place by becoming more of a companion to her son; and that he appreciated her thoughtful efforts was shown by his well-assumed cheerfulness.

Maud, as was right and proper, now made her home with her husband's family; and when Ned and his mother did not call to see her in the evening she called to see them. Nor was Maud any happier than Ned under her improved worldly conditions.

Her present mode of living was in striking contrast with any of her past life which she could bring to mind, yet often when riding out with Mrs. Moore she recalled the boating trips on the Harlem with her noble brother, and secretly sighed for the days that were past.

It must not be imagined from this that she carried a heavy yoke, or that she took upon herself the responsible duties of a wife without due consideration.

So far as lay in her power she repaid her invalid husband's love by a loyal devotion and a high sense of duty, but in marrying she gave no thought to herself, or if she did, it was only to consider the effect of her conduct on those she loved.

It is safe to say that if Ned Rand had been strong and prosperous at the time, she would never have married Edgar Moore.

In addition to her readiness to sacrifice everything for Ned, it must be confessed that that strong, deep pity which is said to be akin to love revived the girlish liking for Edgar Moore, and made her eager to lift the black clouds that had fallen on his life.

She knew her own heart better now than before, and down deep in its pure depths she tried to bury forever the thought that her love had not been given with her hand.

Donald Morton had no place in her mind, for, where she could not think well of one, she tried not to think at all. Certain it is that she had not the remotest idea of her relationship to or her claims upon that man, any more than if he were a native of Patagonia.

Perhaps it was as well that she could not see that she was herself the central figure in the strange but imperfectly understood drama going on about her, nor that she was the indirect cause of all the trouble that had come to and was about to befall Ned Rand.

Since Morton had discharged Ned, he tried to excuse the act by working himself into the belief that the young mechanic wanted only an excuse to be his foe.

Morton knew full well that if Ned suspected the truth as to Maud's antecedents, he would be tireless in his efforts to have justice done her, and that his own evidence would have great weight in establishing her claims.

If Morton could have killed all those who stood in his way, he would not have hesitated a moment, provided, always, that it brought no danger to himself.

But as he could not remove such obstacles in this fashion, his plan was to bring upon them such odium as would render their evidence worthless in the minds of people having a respect for character.

Chiswick and Gurly were just the men to plan and execute this work; and except furnishing them with the money they required, Morton made up his mind to hold himself aloof; for it was essential that he should keep his high standing by remaining unknown to the agents employed by his lieutenants.

One evening, about half-past eight o'clock, while Mrs. Rand was sewing in her own room, the girl came in and said that Polly Wogley was down stairs, and was very anxious to see Ned.

Polly had been a frequent and always a welcome visitor at the house, but this night—an unusual occurrence, by the way—Ned had gone out.

“Tell Polly to come up,” said Mrs. Rand.

In a few seconds Polly Wogley rushed into the room, her face flushed with the exertion of rapid walking, and her honest gray eyes filled with anxiety.

“Where is Mr. Rand?” was Polly’s salutation, as she looked eagerly about the room, as if with the hope of seeing him.

“He left after supper,” said Mrs. Rand, rising and

kissing Polly. "But you are in trouble, my child; calm yourself, and tell me if I can help you."

"I am in trouble," said Polly, her voice trembling with excitement. "Where's yer son gone?"

"He did not say, Polly."

"Did he say when he'd be back?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to see him. Are you sure he has not gone to see Miss Maud?"

Polly knew that Maud was now living at Mr. Moore's, but, like nearly all the rest of the world, she was ignorant of her marriage to Edgar.

"It is possible that he has gone there," said Mrs. Rand, thoughtfully, "for Edgar has had a turn for the worse. But why can't I do as well as Ned?"

"I'm not free to tell you now. Wait, wait, and I'll be back again very soon."

Saying this, Polly gathered her shawl about her, for it was a cool evening in the early spring, and darted from the room.

Polly Wogley was moved by no ordinary impulse. She might have saved herself a long walk by taking a street car to Mr. Moore's house; but such a vehicle was too slow for her purpose.

She fairly flew along the streets; and every policeman she passed turned and looked after her, debating in his own mind whether he ought to pursue and arrest her, or leave it to the man on the next beat.

Polly reached Mr. Moore's house out of breath, but in an increased state of excitement.

Maud was near the door when the servant answered the bell, and so she went to Polly at once and led her into the parlor.

"Is Mr. Rand here?" were Polly's first words.

"He is not, Polly."

"Has he been here this evening?"

"No. Why do you ask?" asked Maud, catching the other's excited manner from force of her sympathy.

"I wanted to find him—to warn him not to go to a certain place to-night. There's a trap set for him. Oh, I cannot wait. I must see him before he goes there."

And Polly wrung her hands and rose to her feet.

"Before he goes where, Polly? Tell me all about it. You know my interest. You know if any great harm were to befall my brother, how I should feel it. Calm yourself and tell me all."

"Chiswick, Gurly, and Push, I heard them talking at the Neptune House, about dusk. They have formed a plan to get Ned Rand into a den of thieves—a place where stolen goods are kept; and when he is there, the place will be raided by the police, and all but Ned will get off. Oh, I must save him!" cried Polly, as she hastened to the door.

"But wait, Polly. Wait and I will tell Mr. Moore, Edgar's father, and he will be able to assist. If not, I must go with you. I cannot stand the suspense," said Maud, now quite as much wrought up as Polly.

"No, no; there is danger to you as well as Ned Rand. I don't understand it, and so I can't explain it; but there is danger. I can go where you would be out of place. Leave it to me. God bless you, Miss Maud."

Polly caught Maud in her arms, kissed her, and then darted out before another question could be put.

The torture of doubt is often worse than the agony of direct knowledge.

The death of a dear one, whose eyes we close for the last sleep, may be borne with resignation, if not with fortitude, while the fate of a loved one on a doomed ship drives the mind to distraction before the list of the lost arrives.

Maud felt as if she were being tortured with her hands and feet tied, for she believed that Ned was in a danger of which he was ignorant, and to rescue him from which she was powerless.

Edgar was now so weak as to require all her time and attention.

He had rallied, and the doctors felt for a time that youth, a good constitution, and the impulse to life given by the presence of the gentle Maud would stir to vitality the dormant muscles and sleeping nerves. But the hope was delusive.

Patient, uncomplaining, perhaps unsuffering, he lay stretched on his bed, every bodily function beyond the control of his will, excepting his power over his tongue and the ability to open and close his eyes.

Through the latter his brave soul looked out without flinching.

Robbed of every vestige of passion, of worldliness, of what might be called selfishness, his love for Maud now shone out with a beauty that was not of earth. He never wearied in telling her of this love.

It was the anchor that held him to earth.

It was the light that filled the heaven of his closing life with the glories of mountain sunsets and the beauties of promises fulfilled.

Though only a few months had passed since Maud became his wife, it seemed to him, as he watched her or lay peacefully dreaming of her when she was gone, that ages of happiness had passed since she first kissed his cold forehead, and pressed his helpless hands in hers, and called him:

“My husband!”

At times his frail life fluttered so close to the narrow line that divides time from eternity, that only by an effort of will could he bring himself to realize that the angel he had imagined by his side was his wife, still in the flesh and full of the beauty of youth and devotion.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CHISWICK AND GURLY MAKE A REPORT.

IF happiness consisted of great wealth and the ability to gratify every physical want, Donald Morton ought to have been a very contented man; whereas we know he was just the reverse.

To Chiswick and Gurly he pretended to treat lightly the demands of the unfortunate woman who claimed to be his wife; but at heart he knew that she was all she represented herself to be, and his great dread was that the world would come into possession of this knowledge. Immediately after the return of this woman from the asylum, in which she had been so long confined through his instrumentality, Morton set on foot an inquiry looking to the discovery of the son whom he had sent away with strangers in the long ago, and paid so liberally to be rid of.

Through an English detective agency he learned that the doctor's family into which the child had been adopted, had left England some years before and was now in America.

An American detective agency was given the contract to find the whereabouts of this family in the United States, but they had not had time to set their machinery in operation.

Donald Morton realized more and more the loneliness, if not the lovelessness of his situation; and he felt that if he could be brought into communication with the son from whom he had been glad to part he would make him his heir, if he did not actually disclose their relationship.

Both Chiswick and Gurly believed that the woman was Donald Morton's wife.

"Why," said the latter to Chiswick—for they talked very freely about their employer when not in his presence—"the woman came to me, and I saw enough of her case to be sure that she's Morton's wife, and to know that if the proper lawyer takes hold of her case, she can make it hot for the old man."

"Do you think there's any truth in the woman's story about a child?" asked Chiswick.

"Not the slightest doubt in the world about it. Oh, I tell you when a woman's parted from her child in that way, she hangs on through life to the hope of seeing it again. The more I see of women—and I do see a heap of them in my business—the more convinced I am that they are strange creatures, and that it's no use for a man to try and find 'em out. But you can bet heavy that there's a child hid some place."

"Then you sympathize with the women?"

"Well, yes, Chiswick, I may say I do. You see, I'm the tenderest-hearted man that ever lived; that's one reason why I never married and had a wife and a lot of children of my own."

"Indeed!" said Chiswick, in surprise.

"Yes; I was always afraid that they might die first, and I knew I could never stand that. But as to this woman, I wish, for Morton's sake, she could be put quietly away," said Gurly.

"She has no money. I don't see why Morton should fear her. You know she is stopping with Dr. Kenworthy; the doctor knew her in the past, and he's trying to help her now. I tried to get him to send her away, but the old man got so angry that I was glad to apologize for the suggestion and to get away with a whole skin;" and Chiswick laughed a cold, heartless laugh that revealed all his white teeth gleaming between his lips, like a blade half drawn from its scabbard.

The foregoing conversation is needed to show the utter heartlessness of these two men; it will also give an idea of the cool, business-like way in which they looked at the nefarious business they had on hand.

Dr. Kenworthy had been Morton's physician for many years, without ever becoming his friend. He had suspected him of much evil doing, but it was his business to attend to the man's physical ills without any care for his moral character.

The coming of Mrs. Morton, however, roused the old doctor to action, and without telling her or any one else of his purpose, he set about righting her wrongs, if she had any, and bringing Donald Morton to justice if he deserved it.

Donald Morton sat in his own room one midnight,

about a month after the time when he had formed a compact with Chiswick and Gurly for the ruin of Ned Rand.

He had told Mrs. Belton to go to bed, and that he would himself sit up, as he expected dispatches of importance about midnight.

It was after midnight, nearly two o'clock in the morning, indeed, when he was awakened from a doze by hearing the front door bell.

He ran down, turned higher the light in the hall, and as he admitted Chiswick and Gurly, he eagerly asked:

"What news?"

"Good news," said Gurly.

"Got him?"

"Yes."

"All worked well?"

"Like a charm."

"Let us go inside and talk it over," said Chiswick, coming last into the vestibule and closing the door behind him.

"Good! Come to the dining-room. I think we shall find a little set-out and a bottle of wine there."

Donald Morton, with a feeling of great relief, for he had been very anxious all the evening, led the way to the dining-room, where they found the lights turned up and the table set for three.

"Ha! I'm thirsty," said Gurly, catching sight of the bottle. "Excuse me if I help myself." And he poured out a glass of brandy and tossed it off.

Chiswick and Gurly ate like men coming in hungry

after hard work in the cool night air; but, though Morton went through the motions, nothing solid passed his lips.

He watched his lieutenants as if to read in their faces the reports of the success which he was shortly to hear from their lips.

"Now," said Gurly, drawing his coat sleeve across his lips, and throwing himself back in his chair with a sigh of satisfaction, "I feel better, and quite ready to talk."

"And as you love to hear talk when you are yourself the speaker, I shall smoke while you make the report," said Chiswick, lighting a cigar, and resting his chin on his upturned palms.

"Well," began Gurly, "I could sum up the whole report in the single sentence: 'We have succeeded.' But I have often noticed that people are much more interested in the details of an important event than in the actual results."

"Very true; very true," said Morton.

"Then to begin at the beginning," continued Gurly, as he moistened his lips with a sip of brandy kept conveniently at hand, "we made our rendezvous at the Neptune House, and as the spring boating has begun, we attracted no attention. I should say that our tools attracted no attention, for we were far too wise to appear on the surface ourselves."

"We remained out of sight; but like the man that works the Punch and Judy puppets, we could be found when wanted," chuckled Chiswick.

"We knew our people," continued Gurly. "They are all men that I've defended again and again. And, though it may seem like bragging, I can truthfully say that if it hadn't been for me every man Jack of them would now be in the Sing Sing Penitentiary. Those are high-priced fellows, Mr. Morton—"

"If you spent half the money on them that you got from me," interrupted Morton, "they must be very high-priced indeed."

"We spent every cent," asserted Chiswick.

"Every red," protested Gurly. "We had to rent rooms; then we had to buy, at market price, stolen goods of all kinds, and some of the most valuable goods we had to conceal in the cellar of Ned Rand's house. Ha, ha, ha! very funny that. Burglars generally enter a house to rid it of silver, jewelry, and other valuables, but our men carried these things into Rand's cellar, last night, and left them there—"

"Dangerous business that," said Morton.

"You can bet it was, but our fellows did it safely. Well, after getting our trap fixed, the thing was to coax the game to walk into it."

"Yes, Gurly, that required skill," said Morton, now very much interested.

"We had the skill and the patience," Gurly continued. "We got Push Wogley interested, though the fellow has a sneaking liking for Rand. We knew that Polly Wogley was sweet on Ned, so we used that as a bait, for he's a gallant fellow, always ready

to rush to the aid of folks in distress. We sent a letter through Push, purporting to come from Polly. Chiswick got that up in artistic style, spelling as natural as life and all that. Well, the letter asked Ned to meet Polly at a certain house at nine o'clock last night as she wanted his help 'as much,' the letter said, 'as you wanted mine at one time.' You know she'd helped him when he was sick. Ned bit at the bait. He was on hand. He was conducted to a room where all the goods were stored, and told to remain there till Polly came. Of course Polly did not come at once, but the officers did. We'd sent word to the chief of police; and so the place was raided. Rand was captured, and so was Polly Wogley, who, it seems, had reached the place for the purpose of warning Ned. She got wind of the plot and tried to spoil it; so I'm not at all sorry that she's gone to jail for her impudence."

"And Ned Rand is in jail, charged with robbery and with having stolen goods in his house, for by this time his house has been searched," said Chiswick, flipping the ashes from his cigar with his little finger.

"Splendid! splendid!" exclaimed Morton, adding, in a less ardent tone: "But the plan is only half carried out."

"What do you mean?" asked Gurly.

"I mean that Ned Rand is not yet tried and convicted."

"You could hardly expect to have everything

done in one night, Mr. Morton," said Gurly, in surprise.

"Of course not. But do you feel sure that he will be convicted?"

"As sure, Mr. Morton, as that you sit there. He was a companion of the ex-convict Coots. He was at Coots's funeral, as two detectives can prove. He has been thick with Coots's daughter, for they were captured in the same fence. Knowing what I do, I could clear Rand," said Gurly, taking another sip of brandy, and refilling his glass; "but I don't think there's another lawyer in the world that could do it."

"He is as good as in the penitentiary," added Chiswick. "But I'm a little afraid Push won't like it about his sister. He's a queer fellow, and I think his head hasn't been quite right since the death of his father."

"My friends," said Morton, beaming from one to the other, "you have both done well. Rid me now of this woman who persists in calling herself my wife, and the future is assured—"

Donald Morton suddenly stopped.

A closet door swung open, and the woman in black, with her veil thrown back and her dark eyes blazing stood before them.

CHAPTER XXX.

A THUNDERBOLT.

NEITHER Chiswick nor Gurly would have hesitated about making a false report to Donald Morton if they imagined that their own ends could be served thereby; but as it happened, they told the exact truth as to the trap that had closed on unsuspecting Ned Rand.

Intent upon helping one who had helped him, and as unsuspecting as a child to any danger, Ned Rand went to the place mentioned in the forged letter, and twenty minutes afterward he was in the hands of the police.

It was useless for him to show the letter that was the cause of his coming, or to protest his innocence; the police were familiar with such subterfuges.

He was handcuffed like an old offender, and marched off to the station between two officers, while a number of other officers followed, with the miscellaneous plunder found in the room in which Ned was surprised and captured.

At the station-house Ned saw Polly. She, too, was a prisoner, and this fact prevented his charging her with the treason of which he at first felt she had been guilty.

"Oh, Mr. Rand," cried Polly, when she caught sight of him, "too late I learned of the scheme to ruin you; but I tried to save you. God knows I tried to save you."

"I think you meant right, Polly. But why did you send me this letter?" asked Ned, handing her the note appointing the meeting.

"I never wrote to you. Before Heaven, that is not my work. Wait, wait, and you will see that I have been your friend."

"I'd advise you two not to talk so loud," said the officer in charge of the station. "Come, I'll take your records, and send you to your cells."

Ned and Polly stood up before the desk, and their names, ages, places of birth, occupations, and all that in police parlance goes to make up the "Blotter Record," was written down, and then they were conducted to grated cells, not far apart, yet too far removed to hold any communication.

So unexpected, so humiliating was the blow that had been dealt him, that Ned, during the long hours of that most cheerless night, was unable to collect his thoughts so as to account for his situation.

He was stunned; and he felt that he was the victim of a horrible nightmare, from which he must awake to find himself in his own bed.

He had been sitting for hours on a hard bench, with his head between his hands, when he was roused from his stupor by the turning of a key in a lock.

He looked quickly up, and saw a man opening the

grated cell door, while another man stood behind him with a basket of broken bread and a tin pail surrounded by a lot of tin cups.

"Here's yer breakfast," said the man who opened the door.

The other man filled one of the cups with coffee, and placing a piece of bread on top of it, he set it on the bench beside the prisoner.

"I want nothing to eat," said Ned; "but I will pay liberally if I can get writing materials, and a messenger to carry a note to my mother."

"You can't write any note or get any message here," said the officer. "You must do all them things through your lawyer."

"But I haven't got any lawyer."

"I guess you know where to find one," said the officer, and he went off to make his round of the cells.

Ned did not take further notice of the food.

He sat down and was brooding again, when he heard his name called, and through the bars he saw the sallow, foxy face of Gurly peering in.

"Hello, Friend Rand," called out the lawyer. "Sorry to hear of your trouble. Read of it in the papers not half an hour ago, and came down to offer my services. There must be some mistake about this."

"I am afraid, sir," said Ned, who never had any liking for this man, "that there is no mistake at all."

"Why, Mr. Rand, what do you mean?" asked the lawyer, with well-assumed surprise.

"I mean that I am the victim of a deliberate conspiracy."

"But who could do it? You have no enemies?"

"I should have none. Now, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Mr. Gurly," prompted the lawyer.

"Yes, Mr. Gurly. If you want to help me, get word to my mother that I am here; or, better still, have some one carry a note to her from me."

"I should be delighted to do that, Mr. Rand, but if I act in this matter, it must be in a professional way."

"In a professional way?"

"Yes; as your lawyer," said Gurly.

Ned hesitated. He reasoned that he must have a lawyer, and while he disliked Gurly as a man, he might be able professionally.

Donald Morton had employed him, and this was an evidence that he had skill—at least, that is how Ned looked at it.

"Very well, Mr. Gurly," he said, "act for me professionally. I do not think you will have much difficulty in showing that I am entirely innocent of the crime charged against me."

"I hope not; I hope not, I am sure," said Gurly, making a memorandum in a greasy little book which he fished from his pocket. "One thing is certain, if the case goes against you, it won't be my fault. Now keep mum and I'll come back and talk over matters with you before the preliminary hearing, which is set down for ten o'clock this morning."

Gurley stood before the grating during this conversation, and as he turned to leave, Ned called after him:

"Get word to my mother at once; and you might as well see Polly Wogley before you leave, for I am convinced that she is as innocent as myself."

"You'll pay for her, Mr. Rand?"

"Certainly."

"Very well, I shall find her at once."

Gurley did not have far to go. From the station-house blotter he had already learned the number of Polly's cell; and as he was more familiar with all the passages and cells in that building than the architect who planned it, he had no trouble in finding the girl.

He looked through the grating and saw her sitting down, with folded arms, and a light in her gray eyes that showed she had neither been crushed nor humiliated by the calamity that had come to her.

Gurley called to her, and without rising or showing any surprise at his presence, she asked:

"Well, what do you want?"

"To speak with you, Polly."

"Speak on."

"Come to the bars."

"I can hear you here."

"I'm Ned Rand's lawyer, and he wants me to act for you. I have come to talk over the case with you."

"You have, eh?"

"Yes, Polly."

"Then you must take your pains for your pay. I'm not a fool, Lawyer Gurly."

"You're just the reverse, Polly," he said, coaxingly.

"You can be no lawyer of mine!"

"I can't?"

"I say you sha'n't! Now leave me!"

Polly motioned him away with a gesture of scorn and defiance, and the lawyer obeyed her at once.

As he trotted off he rubbed his nose and looked back now and then toward Polly's cell, wondering what she knew that made her so defiant.

Back and forth, back and forth, Ned Rand paced his cell. His watch had been taken from him, with all his other valuables, by the officers the night before, so that he could not tell the time.

It seemed to him that it must be late in the afternoon, when an officer again appeared, and this time he opened the door and called in a very loud voice:

"Rand, come out."

Ned obeyed; and he had but just reached the cold, gloomy corridor, when he heard a cry some distance away.

"Hello, what's that?" asked the officer.

From the gloom in the direction of the office a fair girl, with golden hair, rushed toward Ned.

"My brother! My brother!" she cried; and the next instant Maud was clasped to the prisoner's heart.

“ You here, my sister ! ” exclaimed Ned.

“ Here, Ned ; here, my brother, ” she sobbed, “ to bear your trials with you, even to the death, and to ward off the unmerited disgrace your foes would bring upon you. ”

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN COURT.

ALL the morning papers contained full and—it need not be added—exaggerated and misleading accounts of the capture of Ned Rand and Polly Wogley.

In these reports the poor girl's character was cruelly treated, and Ned Rand was spoken of as the leader of a gang of thieves that had been making their headquarters at a boat-house on the Harlem river.

Maud was reading the news to her invalid husband when her eyes fell on the account of Ned's arrest the night before.

She managed to stammer through the report, and then, letting the paper fall from her hands, she cried out:

“Oh, my brother's foes pursue him again! It is cruel! It is brutal for journals claiming to be fair to speak in this way of the noblest man that lives. Oh, what shall I do?”

“It is a conspiracy; and since I have been lying so weak and helpless here, I have thought that Mr. Morton, for some reason only known to himself, wants to crush your brother. Do not give way,

dear Maud. Call my father, and he will see that everything is done for Ned. It is impossible that injustice should succeed in this case," said Edgar.

A flush of indignation came to his pale face, and he looked sadly down at his thin, helpless hands.

Mr. Moore was called.

He had already seen the account of Ned's arrest, and as Maud had told him the object of Polly's visit the night before, he had already associated the two events in his mind.

"Father," said Edgar, with an earnestness that flashed in his eyes, "all this is infamous! It is monstrous, and the perpetrators should be exposed to the world and punished."

"It is terrible," said Mr. Moore.

"And," continued Edgar, "while I do not wish to do any man an injustice, I cannot but feel that Mr. Donald Morton is at the bottom of all this. You must go to the station-house and, for my sake and Maud's, as well as his own, you must see that Mr. Rand has the best counsel. Oh, if I could only defend him, it would be the opportunity of my life. But," he added with a sigh, "that may not be."

Mr. Moore felt as his son did about this; and so the carriage was ordered; and when he was ready to go to the station, Maud insisted on accompanying him.

If an angel had been sent for his deliverance, Ned Rand could not have been more lifted up than he was by the coming of Maud, in this terrible hour.

The touch of her lips to his cheek appeared to dispel the odium which he felt had fallen on his good name, while the gloom of the station-house vanished like the mists from the valley when the morning sun looks over the mountains.

The officers, who saw the meeting between the young lady who had come in her carriage and the prisoner who had come from his cell, suddenly lost their prejudices against the man they had arrested the night before, and became prepossessed in his favor.

Wealth lessens guilt in the eyes of many law officials.

There was a telephone at the station-house, and through this Mr. Moore, to the additional surprise of the officers, summoned the senior member of the greatest legal firm in the city—an ex-governor—to meet him at the station-house at once.

Ned, Polly, and other prisoners were taken to the court-room in that abhorrent vehicle known the world over as the "Black Maria;" but Maud, who saw them when they entered, was at the police court to greet them when they were let out.

Gurly was on hand to defend not only Ned Rand, but a number of others who had been arrested for crimes varying in heinousness from "drunk" to "murder."

Governor Webb, the gentleman for whom Mr. Moore had sent, was promptly on hand, and ready for business.

He was introduced to Ned and Polly, and as he was speaking with them in the court room Gurly came up and took part in the conversation.

"See here, my man," said Governor Webb, addressing Gurly as if he were a menial whom he wished to hold at arm's length, "what have you to do with this case?"

"I am Rand's counsel," replied Gurly.

"You are?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then, sir, my firm can have nothing to do with it."

"What do you mean?" asked Gurly.

"I mean, sir," said the Governor sternly, "that we would as soon think of being associated professionally with the criminals who are your clients as with you."

Ned saw at a glance how the matter stood.

He explained to Governor Webb how he had come to engage Gurly, and added:

"I was desperate, and he would not send word to my mother unless I employed him as my lawyer."

Mrs. Rand had been sent for by Maud, and was now with her son.

"Oh!" said Gurly, with assumed indifference, "I am not particular; indeed, it isn't the kind of a case I care to take; so, as I have not yet received any retainer, I shall withdraw. But I shall watch you with interest, Governor Webb."

He bowed, smiled, and left; but Governor Webb

took no more notice of him than if he had been a dog.

After hearing Polly's story Governor Webb became convinced that Ned was the victim of a conspiracy, and he was equally well convinced that it would be a most difficult thing to prove to a judge and jury that this was the case.

"We must have time to work the puzzle out, said the Governor to Mr. Moore. "In the meantime the best thing we can do is to try and get the accused out on bail."

Mr. Moore said for himself—so great was his faith in Ned and Polly:

"I will go on the bond of both these people to the amount of every dollar I own."

The members of Ned's firm, all fine, sensible men, had come to the court, and they, with a number of wealthy friends, were also ready to go on the bond.

The judge heard the evidence on which the accused had been arrested, and seemed unusually grave.

The only charge against Polly Wogley was that she was found in the house, just after entering it, in which Ned Rand was arrested.

Polly was released on a light bail.

But the evidence against Ned Rand went to show that he had associated in the past with bad characters, particularly with Coots, "whom Donald Morton had killed in self-defense."

The evidence further showed that Rand was ar-

rested in a well-known "fence," or place in which thieves secreted stolen goods.

In this place, a valuable lot of miscellaneous articles was found by the police, and some of the owners were ready to swear that they had been stolen from them.

Articles found in the cellar of Ned Rand's house were produced, and the officers who had searched there swore to the facts.

The evidence was the most damaging, and even Governor Webb, though he kept his fear to himself at the time, could not see how it could be successfully met in the final trial; for circumstantial testimony is the hardest to combat.

Gurly heard the proceedings through with evident delight, and he chuckled to himself over Governor Webb's perplexity.

He had not intended to work for Ned's interests, had he been retained—how could he do so?—yet he was elated at his own scheme and the evident confusion into which it threw the counsel for the defense.

The justice was forced to ask for a heavy bond, in the absence of which Ned Rand must go to jail, there to remain till the grand jury had found a true bill against him—which they were sure to do—and the case came up for a final trial.

Heavy though the bail was, it was speedily forthcoming, to the great disgust of Gurly and the inexpressible disappointment of Chiswick, who had been an eager observer of the scene.

Maud and Mr. Moore went home with Ned and his mother in the carriage, to the surprise of the officers and court officials, who had never seen a man charged with robbery and burglary going off in that style before.

Mrs. Rand and Maud wanted Polly to go with them, but she said:

“Not now; I must go home and see Push and my mother. Ned Rand got into this trouble by meaning to help me, and I'll not leave a stone unturned until I ferret the whole affair to the bottom, and punish them that's most to blame.”

Polly, filled with her purpose, went at once to her floating residence on the Harlem, where she explained to her mother the cause of her absence the night before.

“Push is in this, I fear,” said the mother, sadly. “But we oughtent to blame the poor fellow. He broods an' broods, like one with a great trouble on his mind; an' he's done so ever since his father was killed. He's not to blame, Polly, my child, for he's not responsible.”

“He has done his own way,” said Polly, angrily, “and now he must do mine. Till this Chiswick came, Push tried to lead an honest life; and he made as much money as any boatman on the river. His mind may be turned, but that is no reason why his heart should plan the ruin of an innocent man. But he has injured me as well as Ned Rand—me that he has always pretended to love so.”

Polly buried her face in her hands and gave way to a flood of tears, which her mother tried to check.

The poor girl had just ceased speaking when Push appeared from his own room, his heavy face pallid and his eyes afire.

"I still love you, sister," he cried, "and I am ready to obey you from this time straight on to the end—except in one thing.

"In one thing!" repeated Polly. "What have I ever done to you, Push Wogley, that you shouldn't obey me in everything?"

"Nothing! nothing!" groaned Push. "You've always been true, an' square, an' kind to me; an' that's what I've allus told him since he first came here."

"Him! Who's him?"

"Chiswick."

"So he's the man that's led you off, eh?" she said, angrily.

"No; I can't say it is; an' if it was him, I ain't the feller for to go an' blow on a pal."

"Not even if that pal sends yer sister to jail—the sister that's ever been ready to do so much for you?" broke in Mrs. Wogley.

"He didn't mean for to do that. It was an accident."

"Then, Push," said Polly, quickly, "arrestin' Ned Rand wasn't the least bit of an accident, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, I don't think it was," he responded.

"It was a set-up job, eh?"

“Don’t say any more, Polly, for I ain’t a-goin’ to blow. You axin’ me them questions mixes me all up, an’ sets my head to reelin’;” and to avoid her inquiries Push clasped his head and rushed from the room.

“He ain’t been himself since the funeral,” sighed Mrs. Wogley, when her son had gone out of hearing. “An’ so, Polly, my child, we shouldn’t blame him, like we might one that was hisself an’ knew all the ins an’ outs of what he was a-doin’.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DESPERATE MOVE.

MRS. BELTON stoutly declared that she did not know how the woman who claimed to be Donald Morton's wife came to conceal herself in the house.

But the woman was there and she had overheard the talk of the conspirators.

The truth is that Mrs. Belton, who was a cousin of Dr. Kenworthy's, did secrete the afflicted woman in the closet from which she emerged so dramatically; but, surely, we ought to pardon the misrepresentation of one whose sympathies were now enlisted on the side of justice.

"Monsters!" shrieked the woman, her black eyes flashing with scorn and fury. "I am desperate, and I defy you!"

She strode to the door, not one of the astonished men being able to utter a word or to raise his hand to stay her.

Suddenly turning, as if drawn by some unseen irresistible force, she pointed a long finger at Chiswick, and asked:

"Young man, who are you?"

Taken aback by the question and the woman's

tragic, imperative manner, Homer Chiswick stammered out his name.

"Are you of this man's blood?" she demanded, this time pointing at Morton, who appeared sinking into his chair under her withering glance.

"I am not," replied Chiswick.

"Then fly from him as you would fly from the plague. He murdered his own son, and he will try to murder you as he tried to murder me." Then, with greater vigor:

"But I live! I live! And as surely as a just God rules up there!" she cried, with her blazing eyes lifted to the ceiling, "so surely will justice overtake this man, against whose name the Recording Angel has written down every sin that humanity is capable of."

Again the woman turned, and her light, quick step could be heard going down the hall to the front door.

It was not till the door closed behind her that the three men regained anything like self-possession.

"Some of the servants are in with this woman," said Morton, with an oath; "and if I can find who it is, I'll make it hot for him or for her, as the case may be."

"Better say nothing about it, but watch and listen," said Gurly, again drinking to steady his nerves.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to buy the woman off," suggested Chiswick, now the coolest by far of the three.

"If you can buy her off, or rid me of her in any other way," said Morton, "I will comply with any demand you may make, short of committing suicide, damaging my character in the sight of the world, or going to the poor-house to end my days."

"Do you mean it? "

"I do, Chiswick,"

"Witness the bargain, Gurly," said Chiswick, as he shook hands with Morton.

Soon after this the meeting broke up, Chiswick and Gurly going to their boarding-houses, and Morton going to bed.

The next night, at an earlier hour, they met in the same place to discuss the result of the preliminary hearing in Ned Rand's case.

Chiswick stayed but a few moments, saying that business of great importance required him to be away.

"Besides which," he added, addressing Morton, "Gurly is a lawyer, and can tell you how matters stand much better than I can."

Gurly began at his task at once.

He was not at all pleased with the proceedings in court that morning; but, instead of revealing his true feelings, he sought to show Morton how everything had turned out for the best and that the desired end was certain.

Morton was more than willing to take a rosy view of affairs, yet he could not but see that Ned Rand, for a man charged with a heinous crime, had developed a great deal of strength and influence.

"I'm surprised that Mr. Moore was there," he said.

"He was there on account of that girl. Some say that she's married to young Moore. Ah, she's lucky!" said Gurly. "The luckiest girl in the city and State of New York to-day."

"But Moore engaged Governor Webb?"

"Yes; and I'm glad he did."

"Why so, Gurly?"

"Because Webb knows no more about criminal law than a child. I could give him big odds, and then discount him. But I have a bold scheme to upset Moore, disgust Webb, and floor Maud Rand," said Gurly, with a confident manner.

"What is that?" asked Morton, sitting straighter to show his interest.

"I've told you that this girl, before going to Moore's, had been seen going in and out of a certain pawn shop?"

"Yes; you and Chiswick told me that."

"That pawnbroker is my friend and will do as I say—if I make it worth his while."

"What of that?"

"There is this of it, Mr. Morton. I know one of Moore's servants, a footman. I saved him from the penitentiary years ago, and I could drive him from his place if I wanted to. Well, this fellow must pick up some of Mrs. Moore's jewelry and a lot of the plate. He'll give them to me; I'll give them to the pawnbroker; and when the robbery is discovered

—which can be arranged to take place at once—the pawn-man will be ready to swear that he gave Maud Rand, or Moore, or whatever her name is, money on these articles; that she pawned them under an assumed name, and that she has the tickets. Why, it would work like a charm, for the man told me that one day, when the young lady was about to enter his shop, Mrs. Moore appeared in a carriage and carried her off. All this will go to confirm the charges against Ned Rand, and it will kill his character before the trial if he had a hundred times as many friends.” And Gurly rubbed his hands and fairly beamed on his employer.

“Your contract is to help me in any and every way in this matter, and I expect you to do it,” said Morton, striking the table with his fist. “We must make a bold move! We must stop at nothing! Can’t you see that ruin follows failure? Succeed, and you will be a rich man. Fail, and, by all that’s sacred, I’ll bring ruin on all who pretended to help me and didn’t. Work, man; work! There is no time to lose!” And with bulging eyes and a flushed face Morton began pacing the room.

Declaring that he would not leave a stone unturned to win, and that success was as certain as that to-morrow’s sun would rise, Gurly left the house.

He had been gone but a few minutes when Chiswick came back again, this time in great haste.

In reply to Morton’s question he said:

“I met that woman at Dr. Kenworthy’s and had a

long talk with her, for she seemed to take a great fancy to me. While she was gone from the parlor to get some papers, which she wanted to show me to prove her claim, I hurriedly secreted my watch, sleeve buttons, and diamond pin in a satchel she left on the table."

"Why did you do that?" asked Morton, his mind dazed by the ease with which Gurly and Chiswick planned and executed fictitious robberies for the trapping of other people.

"We can prove that she was found secreted here last night, and then swear out a warrant charging her with stealing those things. You will only have to swear that the watch is mine, as you made me a present of it," said Chiswick, with a meaning wink.

"But I never made you a pres—"

"You must swear that you did. Are we to do all the dirty work and you to hold back?" said Chiswick, angrily. "Will you swear to this? Say yes or no."

"Ye—yes," stammered Morton.

"Good," exclaimed Chiswick. And on the word, he turned and darted out of the house.

Donald Morton drank a stiff glass of brandy, in the hope of calming his mind and steadying his excited nerves, then he went to his own room. But it was long since he had enjoyed a peaceful sleep, and this night proved no exception to the rule.

By turns he paced his room, or stopped before his looking-glass, or to drink from the black bottle on

his dressing-case till all its fiery contents were gone.

But the walking brought no fatigue, and the drinking no oblivion.

Indeed, his desperate efforts to drown his thoughts only served to bring them more vigorously to the surface.

He swore at his thoughts, he swore at his looks, and, with profane impartiality, he swore at himself.

The rattle of milk wagons in the street told that the light of another day was coming, when, without removing his clothes, Donald Morton threw himself on the bed, and he looked to be asleep.

But he rolled, and groaned, and tossed, for sleep does not always come as a curtain to shut out the waking thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

AFTER the new compact with Donald Morton, Chiswick did not return to live with him, as has been hitherto shown.

He had lodgings in a hotel near by, where he could be but rarely found; and he had a room in the Neptune House, where he kept his papers and more important effects, and where he could meet Push and his associates whenever he thought their services necessary.

Scarce a day passed without finding Chiswick at the floating house on the Harlem.

He kept his room closely locked, for he knew that neither Polly nor her mother liked him. Indeed, they had ordered him to leave again and again; and it was only the sullen opposition of Push—with whom they desired no rupture—that prevented their enforcing their wishes in this matter.

But a time had come when the clouds must be lifted from Push's sight; for though he had changed much since his father's death, his devotion to his mother and sister was increased, and he was more than ever ready to defend them.

Another strange thing in connection with this

young man, in whom the criminal tendencies and weakness of character of his father were blended with the more sterling qualities of his mother, was his idolatrous devotion to Maud Rand.

He had never exchanged a half dozen words with the beautiful girl, nor even dared to meet her gaze when he stood in her presence or passed her on the river, yet, when alone, he would mutter her name over and over, as if there were music in the sound.

Polly knew of her brother's worship of Maud, and she determined to use it to baffle the schemes of Chiswick, which she but imperfectly understood.

A few days after her release from prison, Polly made Push take her for a row, and when they were out of hearing of every one else, she said to him:

"Do you know, Push, that not only Ned and myself, but Maud also is in danger, an' you helped put her there?"

"Me—hurt Maud!" exclaimed Push.

"Yes, you."

"I wouldn't let no one else say that to me," he growled.

"An' I wouldn't say it to you if it wasn't true. Now don't get angry at me, Push, but I have wanted to tell you that I never thought that you'd become Chiswick's dog, an' at his biddin' bite and tear them that you once loved," said Polly.

"I'm no one's dog!" snapped Push. "Prove yer words."

"If I could only get into Chiswick's room, over there in the boat-house," she said, waving her hand in the direction of their home, "I am sure I could soon prove my words."

"Then, by——, I'll give you the chance!" cried Push.

He seized the oars, placed his feet against the braces; and, urged by his skill and immense strength, the boat seemed to leap from the water in the direction of the Neptune House.

Polly was alarmed at the expression on her brother's face and the unusual impetuosity of his manner, yet "something told her," as she explained afterward, that "she was on the right track."

The instant the boat reached the floating landing, Push leaped out and made it fast, then rushed for the sitting-room.

"I can get into that room!" he shouted, and he dashed toward it, followed by Polly.

He did not attempt to try lock or bolt, but leaping against the door like a mad animal, it gave way with a crash.

The apartment contained, in addition to the furniture, a suit of rowing clothes and a valise, both Chiswick's property.

"There ain't nothin' in the clothes," said Push, as he felt the empty pockets. "The proof, if there is any, must be in this," he added, picking up the valise and breaking the lock as if the fastenings were of glass.

He turned it upside down on a bunk bed, and there rolled out several bundles of neatly tied papers, and two tissue paper parcels that broke apart, revealing two distinct chains and two hearts of gold.

“One of them’s the one Miss Maud uster wear,” cried Polly, as she picked up the lockets; “an’ the other—the other’s a imitation. Chiswick stole this from her when he was pretendin’ to nuss Ned. Oh! he’d have killed him if it hadn’t been for my dream!”

“An’ Chiswick stole that from *her*?”

“Yes, Push. Why, Miss Maud’s showed it to me again and again. See, here’s the pictures of her father an’ mother,” said Polly, springing open the lids.

“That proves that Chiswick’s a thief; but I know’d that, though I didn’t think he’d steal from *her*. Now, where’s the proof of his prosecutin’ folks?”

“In these papers, Push,” replied Polly, at a venture. “Come to my room, where I can read ’em over, or let us go to Mr. Moore’s or Ned’s an’ ax a’vice.”

“No, Polly, I’ll not go. You take ’em an’ let me know the news. If it’s all as you say, I’ll avenge the oath that Chiswick made to my father in that room out there, for he’s a traitor.”

Again the thick lips were compressed till the mouth looked like a line, and the small eyes burned with a fire that was not lit by reason.

“Do nothing now, Push, without advising with

me," said Polly, stroking his shoulder and trying to still the tempest she had raised.

Telling her mother her purpose, Polly put on her coat and hat, and, with the papers and the locket and chains in a little market basket, she started for Mr. Moore's house, where it was rumored that Edgar was dying.

Polly had been gone about twenty minutes, when Chiswick entered the boat-house in great haste.

On the instant he saw the open door of his room and Push sitting near by, with his arms folded and his head bowed on his breast, as if drunk or asleep.

"Hello, Push!" shouted the astonished Chiswick. "Who the devil has been in my room?"

"I have," said Push, as he looked slowly up at his questioner.

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"What did you do that for? Are you drunk?"

"I ain't drunk; but Polly said that the proofs of your bein' a traitor was there; an' so I was bound to see if she was as right this time as she 'most always is," growled Push.

With a cry of fear and rage, Chiswick ran into the little room, and came back in a moment with the valise, wrecked and empty, in his hands.

"Who has robbed me?" he cried.

"Robbed? Come, Chiswick, nothing of that kind about Polly, or, by Death! I'll catch you in my arms

an' leap into the Harlem with you an' hold you under till you're drowned," said Push, leaping to his feet and approaching the other.

Chiswick saw that his hold on this man was gone and that it would be dangerous to cross him further in his present mood.

But he was not the man to sink under one blow.

"I saw your sister hurrying down town, as I came here. Where was she going?" he asked.

"I think," replied Push, grimly, "she was goin' for you."

"To what house?"

"Rand's; mebbe Moore's."

"That's all you can tell me?"

"That's all I will tell you, except this, Chiswick;" here Push came over and brought his face close to the other's: "If I find that you were false to my father—to Coots—an' that you've been in with Morton all along, instead of goin' for him as you said you'd do, then I'll keep one side of that oath—"

"That oath?" gasped Chiswick.

"The oath you made to my father in this room, when he told you all 'bout Morton an' Maud Rand. I heard it all, an' for the ole man's sake I've give it away to nobody, but kep' it to mysel'. Now leave me; I'm in no humor to be fooled with."

Push waved his hand toward the open door, and Chiswick darted off in the hope of finding Polly before she had communicated her discovery, for in the papers she had carried away there was a complete

history of Maud's case, with all the proof necessary to establish her identity.

If Polly placed those papers in the hands of any one who could understand their value—and she would be sure to do this—then Morton would be exposed, and Chiswick would be shown to be a partner in a most heinous conspiracy and crime.

He realized that all his efforts to get Morton into his power at the last threatened to condemn himself with the same crimes.

As he hurried along the streets, looking to the right and left in the hope of seeing Polly, he was stopped by Gurly.

The criminal lawyer was even more excited than Chiswick, for he trembled in voice and form as he said:

"It's a matter of life and death, Chiswick. You must see Dr. Kenworthy at once. His house is near here."

"Why should I see him?"

"About that woman you had put in jail a few days since."

"What about her?"

"*I cannot tell you. Don't ask me,*" groaned Gurly.

"I have no time to go to the doctor's now. My God, man, Polly Wogley has stolen my papers."

"Still, this is of more importance. Come! Come!"

And Gurly took Chiswick by the arm and led him into Dr. Kenworthy's house.

“Chiswick,” said the old doctor, “I have discovered that you and your father are villains.”

“My father!” repeated Chiswick. “I have neither father nor mother; that you know.”

“I have discovered both,” cried the doctor. “Donald Morton is your father.”

“And my mother—my mother?”

“Your mother,” was the awful reply, “is the unfortunate woman whom your father failed to kill, and whom you have sent to jail through your perjured testimony.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LIFE AND DEATH.

DOCTOR KENWORTHY was entirely right in the representations made to the astonished Chiswick.

It will be remembered that Donald Morton had made great efforts of late to learn the whereabouts of his son.

The young man had come to America; of this he was sure; and so he employed detectives on this side to find the son whom he had so cruelly cast off long years before.

The result of this investigation was that on that very morning the detectives perfected all their evidence and traced all their clues to the end; and that end proved that Homer Chiswick was Donald Morton's son.

As Dr. Kenworthy, who had befriended the young man and introduced him to Donald Morton, was an important factor in this investigation, he was among the first to learn the news.

Chiswick was soon convinced of the truth of Dr. Kenworthy's statement; and before the overwhelming force of newer feelings and stronger thoughts, he forgot all about Polly Wogley and the valuable documents of which she had despoiled him.

We have failed in portraying this remarkable young man's character if the reader imagines for a moment that he was capable of remorse for the evil he had done, or of any resolve to do better in future.

Yet, it should be said that he was not ignorant of the glaring defects in his own character, but he tried to excuse them to himself by saying:

"I have never known a mother's love."

But here was his mother now. The mother who had been so cruelly used by Donald Morton; the mother whom he, the son, had deliberately plotted against and persecuted at the bidding of his own father.

The thought was horrible.

"I shall confess the truth and free this innocent woman!" cried Chiswick, when all his doubts were vanished. "But as for Morton, though it results in my own immediate ruin, I shall destroy him—so help me God!"

"Then come with me at once," said Dr. Kenworthy. "Come while your mind is inclined to justice, and let it be done without fear—let it be done without delay, for every moment's waiting adds to the crime."

"And bear in mind," said Gurly, as they hurried out, "that I've advised Morton from the beginning to stick to the truth."

"Don't lie!" hissed Chiswick, adding with an oath: "Gurly, you are in all these villanies with me, and you must bear your part."

While Chiswick was having the veil of obscurity lifted from his own past, and having the parents about whom he had wondered revealed to him, a scene even more startling and equally important—more important, indeed, to those in whom we are most interested—was being enacted at Mr. Moore's mansion.

Thither, with all speed, Polly Wogley had made her way; and the first person she met on entering the house was Maud.

"I've got him at last!" was Polly's salutation, when after kissing Maud she held up the basket.

"Got what, Polly?" asked the astonished Maud.

"Chiswick."

"I do not understand you."

"Well, I'll explain."

And Polly told all she knew and all she had suspected about Chiswick.

This done, she exhibited the contents of the basket, and frankly told how she had come by them.

Maud's delight at finding the chain and the heart of gold was unbounded.

The second one was an imitation Chiswick had made for some undeveloped purpose of his own.

She kissed it and cried over it, as if it were a dear friend from whom she had been long parted.

"An' he had a copy of it made," said Polly, holding up the imitation, "so's to fool some one; but he got left."

Maud, realizing that this was a discovery of the

very greatest importance, at once called in Mr. Moore.

When Mr. Moore and his wife heard the story, and glanced over the papers, they decided to send for Ned Rand and Governor Webb, and to hold a conference at once.

Maud, Mrs. Moore, and Polly went up to Edgar's room, while Mr. Moore went out to summon the other interested parties to a conference at his house.

Poor Edgar! Though the hand of death was on him, he brightened up and seemed to gain strength, while Polly for the third time told her story.

Maud exhibited the heart of gold, and Mrs. Moore, who had never seen it before, took it in her hands and opened the lids, remarking, nervously:

"That heart of gold recalls my dear young sister Agnes, who married a brother of Donald Morton, but who disappeared long years ago with her child."

She looked at the face of Maud's mother, and a cry of surprise died away on her lips, for she had swooned.

Maud's mother, as it was subsequently proved, was Mrs. Moore's sister and Edgar Moore's aunt.

Edgar, as soon as his mother was restored to consciousness, said, as he kissed Maud:

"I could not love you more if it should be proved that you are my cousin. Yet I shall be glad of it, for you will be more like a daughter to mother and father when—when I am gone."

Within an hour, Governor Webb and Ned Rand

were at Mr. Moore's house, and as Edgar was profoundly interested, and the doctor, who had been summoned, did not think the excitement could hurt him, it was decided to examine the journals and papers in his presence.

Chiswick had kept a careful journal of all his transactions with Coots and Donald Morton.

He gave Maud's history as he had learned it from the ex-convict, and then, with surprising care, he recorded every step in the investigations which he began to prove that Maud was Donald Morton's niece and that she had been defrauded by her uncle out of the large fortune left by her father.

Never a lawyer or detective exhibited more skill or patience than Chiswick had shown in this.

In his journal he boldly declared that he had two objects in view: first, to destroy Donald Morton by showing his true character to the world and bringing him under the whip of the law; and, second, to marry Maud Rand, who was the right owner of the vast estate held in the name of her cruel and unnatural uncle.

Not only this, but in his journal Chiswick explained the murder of Coots, and he gave in detail all the phases of the infernal conspiracy that had recently resulted in the arrest of Ned Rand.

Ned was asked to explain how Maud came to be adopted into his family.

"For," said Governor Webb, who, like the others, was overwhelmed by this startling evidence, "Mr.

Rand will be the all-important witness in this case."

Brave, noble Ned! he had never given a thought to the generous and manly features of his own conduct, simply because it would have been impossible for him to have acted in any other way.

In a clear, straightforward manner he told his story :

How he had been working over-hours, and was going home one winter's night—he gave the exact date—when the attention of himself and a companion named Pippis was attracted by the groaning of a poor woman in a doorway.

He told about the child; of how he had summoned an officer, and how, on his return, he found a man, whom he was now assured was Coots, holding the child in his arms and trying to take from her neck the chain and the heart of gold.

But it is unnecessary to repeat here facts which must still be fresh in the mind of the reader.

Ned loved the helpless child from the first, and he would have adopted her himself, but he was not then of age; as it was, the papers were made out in his mother's name.

"And," he said in conclusion, "from that time on I have loved her with all my heart, and cared for her to the best of my ability. And Maud—God bless her!—has paid us back ten thousandfold for every act of kindness we have done her."

"No, no!" cried Maud, starting up and throwing

her arms about Ned's neck, while her tears fell on his handsome face, "I can never repay you! Life is all too short for me to prove my love for you and mother."

"I feel," said Edgar, with his pale face turned to the group, and a spiritual light in his deep, dark eyes, "that Heaven has been kind to spare me till this day."

"I must confess," said Governor Webb, "that in all my practice, and, I may add, in all my reading, I never heard of a case so novel and startling as this."

"It is clear to me," said Mr. Moore, "that Morton is one of the greatest criminals unhung."

"It looks that way," said the lawyer; "and he has surrounded himself by tools of the same stamp; but this Chiswick is likely to prove his ruin. Now, with your consent, I will take these papers to my office—I have a good safe there—and with my partners I will look them over at once, and we will decide immediately on the best course to pursue."

"Chiswick an' Donald Morton an' Gurly, an' all them thieves an' conspirators," said Polly, "shouldn't be left out of the jail not one day. An' it's my candid opinion that, just as soon as you begin to jug them, they'll begin to blow on each other, and in that way the whole truth'll come out."

"Polly, your reasoning in this convinces me of your good sense," said the Governor; "and when the case is concluded, I think all will agree that you deserve

most of the credit for righting the wronged and bringing the criminals to justice."

"Ah, I haven't had a chance to do much," said Polly, blushing. "But there is nothing that I wouldn't do to help Miss Maud and Ned Rand."

Governor Webb left Mr. Moore's, and on the way to the office he passed Donald Morton, riding furiously in the opposite direction.

That very morning Donald Morton had learned that his partner in crime was his own son.

With this revelation it seemed to Donald Morton that the bottom had dropped out of all his schemes; that the cloak had fallen from his crimes; and that he stood revealed to a scorning world in all the hideousness of his true character.

In the carriage which Lawyer Webb passed, Morton was hastening to find Gurly.

He had reputable lawyers who attended to the legal matters pertaining to his business and large invested interests, but he dared not seek their aid in assisting him to extricate himself from the meshes with which his crimes and his tools had enveloped him.

He was maddened at the thought of failure, fearful of the consequences of exposure, and beside himself at the recent revelations.

Never for an instant did he regret the crimes of the past; it was only the miscarriage of his schemes that cut him.

He did not find Gurly in, and the boy who took

care of Gurly's office did not know when his employer would be in.

"Tell him to come to this address as soon as he can," said Morton, throwing his card to the boy.

Then he went down to the carriage and drove home.

On entering the house he asked for Mrs. Belton, but she was not in the house—had not been in that day.

"Where has she gone?" he asked of the butler.

"She's left for good, sir," was the reply. "Said as how she wasn't a-comin' back here no more. And her niece, sir, she went with her."

Donald Morton cursed Mrs. Belton; said she was a traitor; and then ordered brandy and water.

He drank enough to have made two ordinary men drunk, but the liquor had no more effect on him than if it were water, nor did the taste affect him any more.

He went to his own room and lay down on the bed.

He closed his eyes, but even then he did not look to be asleep.

He mentally surveyed all the past, as if hunting for the line, the deviation from which made his first error.

As this was the line of rectitude, we may be sure he did not find it, for he did not know what rectitude was, though he may have known it once.

Again and again he rose; went down to the din-

ing-room and drank; and again and again he went through the action of going to sleep.

He took a cup of coffee about dark, and dressed with his usual care, as if about to go out; but as he was in the act of going down stairs the bell rang, and he heard the servant talking to Gurly in the hallway.

"Why did you not come when I sent for you?" was Morton's salutation.

"I couldn't," whispered Gurly, stepping into the reception-room and turning up the gas.

"Why couldn't you come?" growled Morton.

"Because of the danger."

"Danger!"

"Yes; and I shouldn't be here now."

"Why not?"

"Because I fear the game's up."

"My God! Gurly, what do you mean?" cried Morton.

"I mean that Chiswick's papers are in the hands of Rand's lawyer's—"

"And Chiswick?"

"Chiswick has confessed, and his mother is again free. Hasn't he been here?" asked Gurly, looking about him, as if expecting to see his companion in crime.

"Curse you! how could he come if he confessed to a crime?" shrieked Morton. "Wouldn't the officers have him?"

"An officer was detailed to come with him. Oh,

Mr. Morton, in my efforts to befriend you, I have been led into errors that I fear will affect my standing as a lawyer, if, indeed, my personal freedom is not imperiled," whined Gurly, who was now thoroughly alarmed.

"What shall I do?" asked Donald Morton, desperately. "Where can I go to avoid the dangers that confront me on every hand?"

"Confess, or, better still, run away and leave me to manage your property. With plenty of money, I can straighten everything out in a year or two, and then—"

A violent ringing at the front door-bell prevented Gurly from finishing his sentence or developing his plans.

Many steps, and the hoarse murmur of voices in the main hall, told that there were a number of men coming in.

As the reception room was occupied, the servant conducted the new-comers to the library and lit all the gas jets in the great gilded chandelier.

Dr. Kenworthy, Chiswick, Ned Rand, and four officers entered the room; then Push followed, as if he did not belong to the party.

He slipped into a corner, where, half-hidden by a curtain, he fixed his wild eyes on the broad red stain that marked the spot on which his father had breathed out his unfortunate life.

"Gentlemen in the libr'y as wants to see you an' Mr. Gurly, sir," said the servant, holding the recep-

tion-room door open and speaking in a loud, nervous tone that could be heard all over the house.

"There's no getting out of it, Morton. We must put on a bold front and go in," said Gurly.

Donald Morton did not reply, but with an unsteady step and a blanched face he entered the library.

Chiswick, with a look of indescribable hate in his black eyes, turned away in scorn, refusing his father's extended hand.

Donald Morton looked down at the dark stain on the floor, and cursed himself for not having had it removed.

And then, drawn by an impulse that he could not resist, he gazed at that curtain, behind which he had concealed himself to do a murder one night, and there he saw the burning eyes of Push Wogley.

"Donald Morton," said an officer in citizen's clothes, "it is my duty to arrest you—"

"To arrest me!" said Morton, staggering back.

"To arrest you in the name of the commonwealth of New York, on the charges of murder, robbery and conspiracy," said the officer, and he placed handcuffs on Morton's wrists with the quickness of magic.

"Who makes those charges?" asked Morton.

"I make them for one," said Chiswick, coming forward and standing on the black stain in the middle of the room that marked the spot where Coots died.

The click of a pistol was heard in the corner, and every face was turned toward Push.

He stood erect, with an insane glare in his eyes and a revolver in his hand.

"Why are you here?" gasped Morton.

"I am here to keep my father's oath! You killed him, but it was Chiswick that betrayed! Chiswick is your son, and I am Coots's son!"

A flash, a crash, a groan, and Homer Chiswick lay across the black stain with a crimson spot on his right temple.

Push looked at the dying man, then dropped the pistol and reaching out his arms for the manacles, he said:

"I swore I'd do it, an' it's done."

CHAPTER XXXV.

HEARTS OF GOLD.

FIVE years, if years of joy, soon fly past.

Let us imagine them as having gone by since the death of Homer Chiswick.

In the meantime the world had learned about all Donald Morton's villanies.

People still talked about the monster's treatment of his brother's widow and child, and some saw the hand of Heaven in the awful retribution that had overtaken him.

His life was exposed through his own son, who had inherited wickedness from his father, and who had paid the penalty of his treason to the insane son of an ex-convict, who was not nearly so bad as his employers.

Push Wogley was tried for the murder of Chiswick, found to be insane, and sent to an asylum, where he still spends the years of a life that is a perfect blank.

Donald Morton, in the hope of a mercy which he had never shown, confessed all his crimes; but justice must be satisfied, and he was sent to the penitentiary for life.

Shut out from the world, he has ample time to

ponder on his past life and to realize that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Gurly was arrested at the same time as Morton, but before his trial succeeded in escaping, and was never afterward heard of.

Polly Wogley, though her devotion to Ned has never weakened, married a fine young sailor who had long loved her; and taking her mother to live with her, she left the Harlem and its floating home, and is now the mistress of a flourishing hotel in a busy part of the city.

She has a son named Edward Rand Forman, but she calls the boy "Ned," and the youngster drinks from a silver cup presented by his godfather, whose Christian name he bears.

In the settlement of the Morton estate, the widow, who had been so cruelly wronged, was given her dower by the courts—though Maud's consent was necessary.

Mrs. Morton still lives with her friend, Dr. Kenworthy, and she has become famous for the deeds of charity to which her life is devoted.

Mrs. Morton shares her wealth with Mrs. Belton and her niece, and these two ladies now keep a boarding-house in Donald Morton's old mansion, from which the shadows have departed and the stains have vanished.

Edgar Moore lived long enough to see his beautiful wife restored to all her rights and elevated to that social position which her birth entitled her to,

but which her marriage to him—her cousin—would have given.

His dying request, whispered in her ear, was :

“Maud, Ned has ever loved you ; I saw this too late. You must wed him when I am gone, and may Heaven bless you both.”

And Heaven has answered the prayer of the dying youth, for there is not in all this happy land to-day a happier man than Ned Rand, nor a happier woman than his beautiful wife.

Mr. and Mrs. Moore gladly consented to the marriage, the only condition being that Maud and Ned, and Ned's noble old mother, should live with them henceforth.

This request was complied with ; and so there were those to fill the dead youth's place, and at the same time to keep his dear name in an ever-fresh remembrance.

There is a younger Edgar and a younger Maud in the house, and the hearts of the older people are lightened by their beautiful faces and the musical laughter, for time has rolled back the years, and they live their happy young days over again.

THE END.

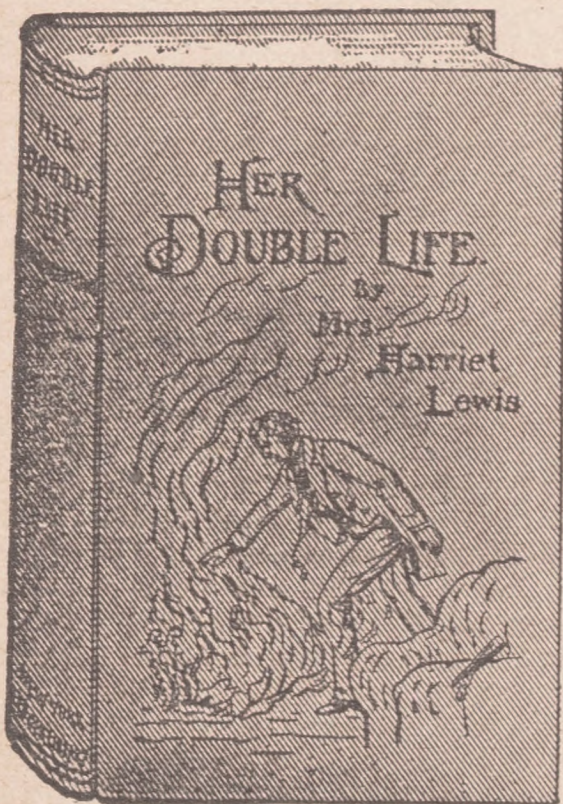
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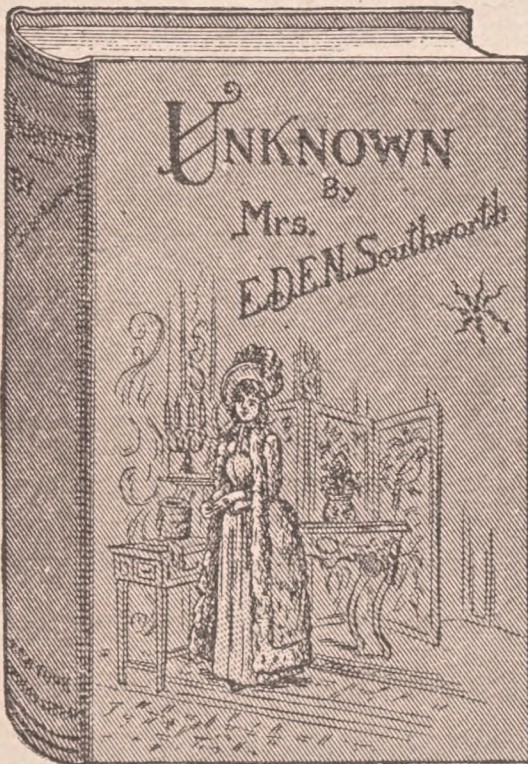
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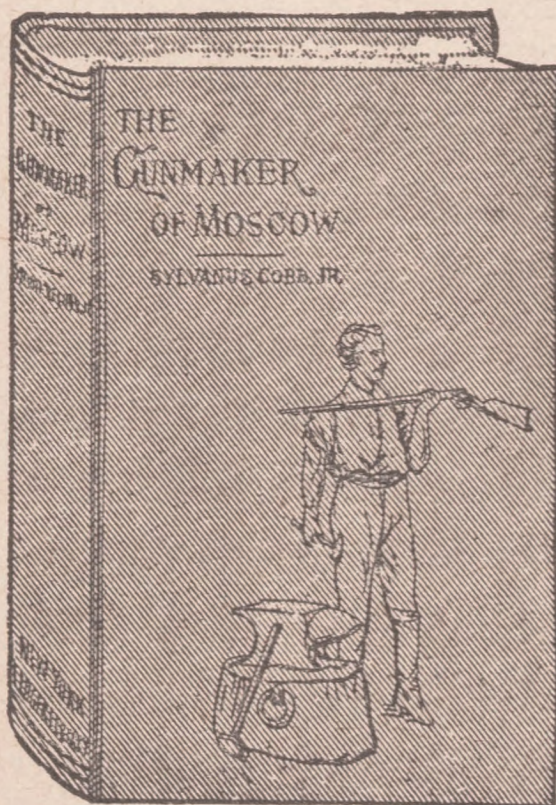
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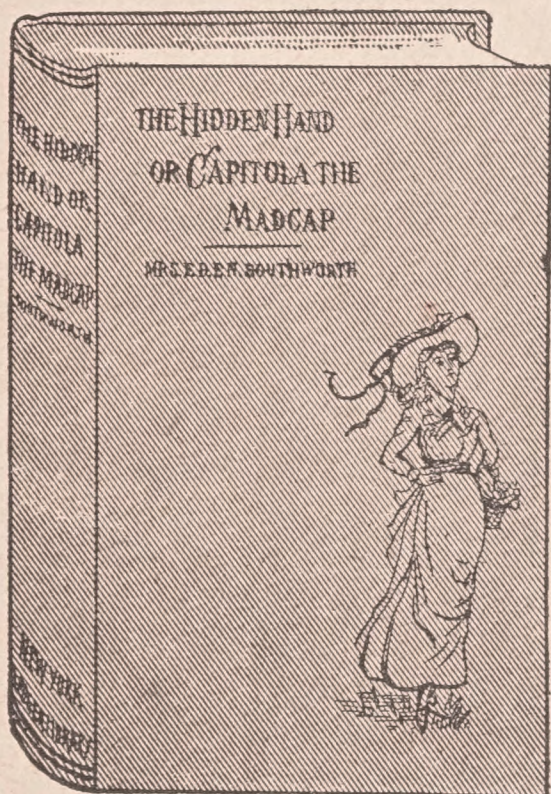
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